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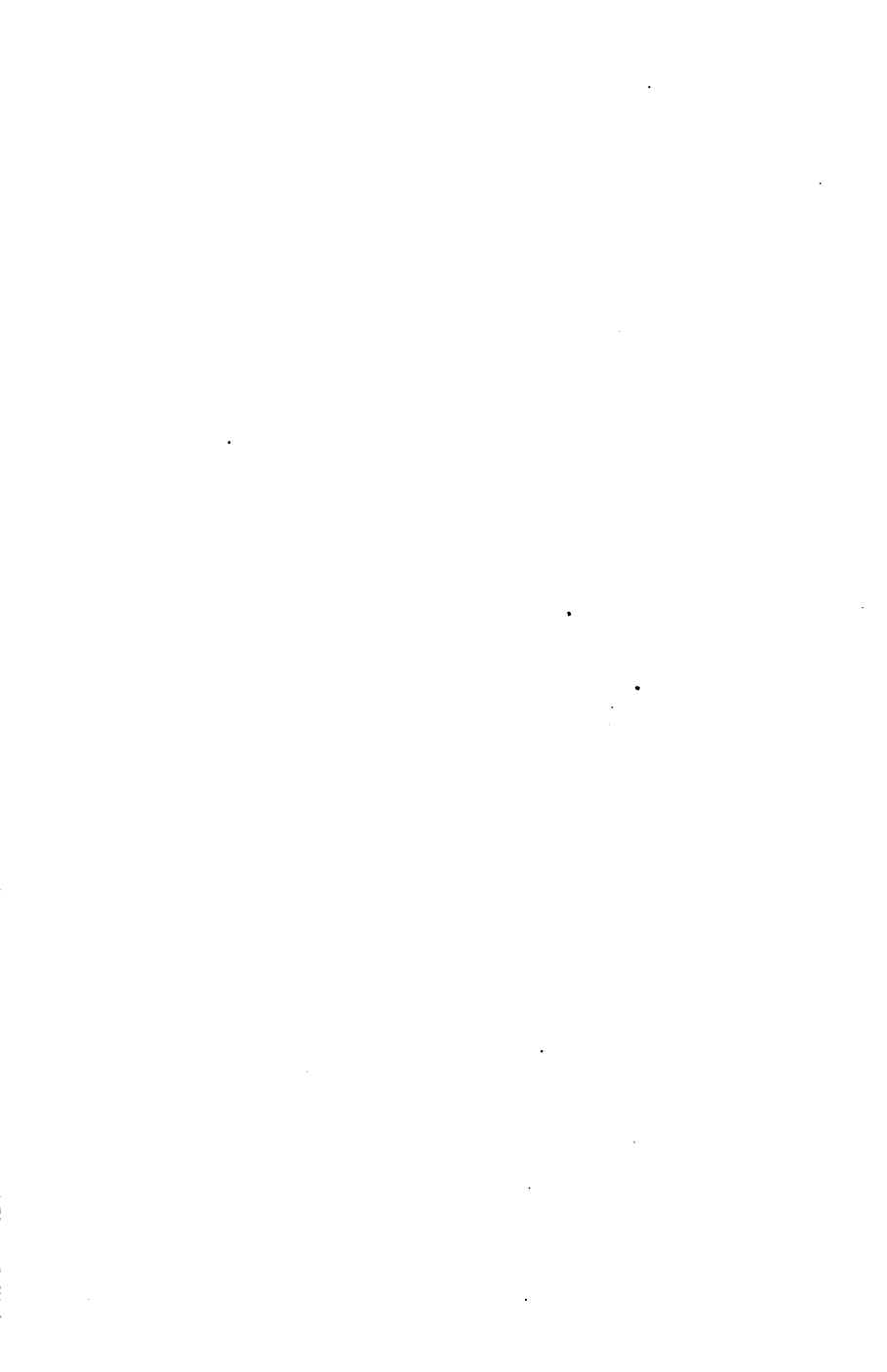
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THE PRIVATE TUTOR

THE PRIVATE TUTOR

BY

GAMALIEL BRADFORD, JR.

"A blossom twinkling from a ruined wall:
Old stones, young love, and sunshine over all."



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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TO
H. F. B.
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THE WEARY FASCINATION
OF ROME



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THE PRIVATE TUTOR

CHAPTER I

IN THE ARENA

It was at Rome, in the Colosseum, on a morning early in November, near the very close of the nineteenth century. The sun was bright and warm, as it is in Rome, even at that season ; and the ruined walls stood out sharp against an absolutely cloudless sky. A young American was sitting about halfway up the south side of the building, with sketching paraphernalia about him, — easel, canvas, brushes, etc. ; but the canvas was quite blank, and the young man was leaning back, gazing idly, with his hands clasped behind his head, apparently absorbing the picture before he painted it. He was a well-dressed young man, with an air of ease and opulence about him, which did not suggest the painting of pot-boilers. Large of frame and almost heavy of features and expression, he yet had a something of good-humor and shrewdness in his face, which made you feel that he would be a pleasant companion. As that is all he is called upon

to be in this narrative, it is unnecessary to discuss him further.

The scene at which he gazed had those contrasted elements which give modern Rome so much of its piquancy. Around, below, and above, were the enormous heaps of stone which have been sung and painted and described so often that to describe them again is a mere insult to the intelligent reader; but their sombre background was relieved here and there by bits and patches of fitting and fleeting mortality. Probably the painter would have liked to seize and hold upon his canvas some one or several of these. At any rate, he seemed to enjoy the contemplation of them.

Below him, on the same side, were two old ladies and an old gentleman, trying to get themselves into the local atmosphere, with the aid of Baedeker. The gentleman would read a passage, while the ladies put their heads close to his and to the book. Then he would look up and around with a puzzled air. A few gestures of conjecture, of conference, of contradiction would follow, and would gradually resolve themselves into a smile of weary contentment. Then another dose of Baedeker.

On the other side of the amphitheatre, another elderly gentleman and a young lady were doing the ruins with a guide. The latter led his victims rapidly from one point to another, and chattered and gesticulated furiously. The young lady absorbed it all with solemn reverence. The gentleman toiled

after them up the steep steps and over the rugged platforms ; and you could see, with the naked eye, that he heartily wished himself back in Wall Street.

Farther away still, high on the top tier of seats, three merry girls were laughing and flirting with a fashionable youth. Their gay gowns fluttered like blossoms against the blue sky ; and one had a red parasol that flashed and flickered like a tongue of fire. What did they care for old ruins and the might of Roman glory and the dead splendors of the world ?

Then the place was stormed by a party of Cook's tourists, booked to do it in twenty-eight minutes, by the watch. They were personally conducted by a tall, lank gentleman with a black suit, a little threadbare, and a white tie, who had evidently been bred a minister, until he stumbled into this nobler form of edification. He halted his flock in a central spot beneath our observer, and began the usual lecture, ground out with the indifference of a performer on the hand-organ. A scrap or two drifted up to the young man's idle ears. "Ladies and gentlemen — magnificent ruins — blood of a thousand victims — all the sins of the Pagan world — pomp, luxury, and heathen splendor." It was "Quo Vadis" in little. And, as the orator called their attention to one spot, and then to another, the personally conducted moved their dull and patient faces all together, like the spectators at a tennis match.

Our artist friend, after watching this spectacle for a few moments, turned his eyes toward the entrance of the amphitheatre and saw an acquaintance. This was a young man of twenty-seven or eight, tall and well-made, rather light in complexion, with a cane in his hand, and cigar in his mouth. His dress was carelessly worn and not costly; but no one would have doubted his being a gentleman. The painter, as soon as he beheld this newcomer, sat upright and uttered a shrill whistle, which sharply interrupted the minister's sermon and made his hearers waste ten seconds, by looking in a direction not allowed for in their itinerary.

The young man below also looked up, paused in uncertainty for a moment, then waved his hand in sign of recognition and rapidly made his way to the whistler's side.

"Hullo, Morris!" he cried. "You here still — and painting?"

"I have n't been here, or painting, all the time since you left, Gordon, my boy. That is a good while ago."

"Three years — only."

"Three years! Hear him! Do you know all the things that might happen in three years? Where have you been? Painting somewhere else?"

"No. I discovered that art was not my proper vocation. Do you still think it yours, Morris?"

"No, Rob. It is my avocation — one of them.

My vocation is amusing myself. I labor in it from morning till night — with poor success."

"But, Dick, I thought you would have been out of this long ago. When I left, you said you were going back to New York, sick of bad luck, bad victuals, and bad pictures, or something of that sort."

"You've got a memory like a graphophone," Morris answered, puffing his cigar. "I did think then, for a while, that I would go back to America and work. But, you see, my aunt turned up. She's awfully rich, my aunt. She's taken a fancy to me, which I've never been able to account for. She wants me to stay — and I stay."

"Manifest destiny," said Gordon, smiling; and his smile was full of a wonderful charm of mingled intelligence and naïveté.

"Just so. But tell me about yourself, Rob. What are you back here for?"

"Well," replied the other thoughtfully, "I'm all changed from what I was." He gazed across the amphitheatre at the girl with the red parasol, who was gazing at him. "No more frolic and foolery, no more champagne and suppers with the ballet."

"What!" cried Morris, in horror. "Not a clergyman surely?"

"No, worse than that. I'm a private tutor."

"A private tutor! Heaven forbid! How did it happen?"

"Do you really want to hear it, you know? It's more tiresome than a novel."

"Oh, no, I hardly think so. Make it as brief as possible."

"It's quite simple," Gordon went on, speaking with broken phrases, punctuated with whiffs of smoke. "When I left here three years ago, I had no money and no real estate, except a little on canvas. I wonder how it would seem to have money."

"I wonder," echoed his companion.

"But your aunt, my friend."

"But the devil, my friend. Go on."

"I sold my canvases in Boston. It is astonishing what people will buy there. But the money didn't carry me very far and I didn't seem to have anything to do. I tried to paint portraits and I got some swell sitters — *mondaines de la dernière élégance*, in fact. The very thought of them chills my blood. I painted them as I saw them. It didn't please them somehow. The art of portraiture seems to be to paint people as you don't see them, and that does n't please me. They were good to me, though."

"Of course they were," interrupted Morris.

"Women always are good to you."

"Are they?" asked Gordon simply.

His companion shrugged his shoulders. For a moment they were both silent. The sky was filling with soft white clouds, and every now and then

one of them rolled its shadow over the vast arena and dulled the radiance of the red parasol. In a few minutes Gordon went on again.

"One of my victims was a Mrs. Keith, who was New England all over ; tall, thin, severe, sedate. She did n't object to my style of painting ; but all such things were vain frivolity to her, and the portrait was merely to be hung in the rooms of her club. All she wanted was to get it over. While I was painting her, I got acquainted with her brother, Harrison Payne. He was tall and thin too ; but he was different. He had been brought up, like her, with sin and Sunday-schools ; but he broke away and went out West, when he was young, made a fortune, married a — I don't know who — lost her, and finally came back to Boston with his son, to live near his sister."

"Payne?" said Morris thoughtfully. "Do I know him?"

"Your aunt does, I'm sure. He was a railroad man, a speculator — is now. Everything he touches is gold — and it does him no more good than it did Midas. He can't spend money, does n't know how."

"Lamentable ignorance," murmured Morris. "Go on. I feel the climax approaching."

"He took a fancy to me, for some mysterious reason."

"Birds of a feather?" suggested the listener, with amiable sarcasm.

"I suppose so. Asked me to dine with him, to

drive with him, to stay with him. Finally, he asked me to take charge of his son."

"And the son is" —

"An oaf, a bumpkin, greener than a day in June. And the most curious shade of green; for the driest sere and yellow is all mixed with it. He is an infant of a hundred and fifty. He knows absolutely nothing of the world's ways, except that he has the greatest contempt for them. He has all the vices, but he is too mean to be vicious. As for money, he worships it. You can't imagine how shrewd he is about getting it; and he sticks to it like glue. Nothing is more amusing than the struggle between his desire for pleasure and his dread of the cost of it."

"But, my friend," interjected Morris, much interested, "you are playing a comedy. It is charming, the idea of your tutoring this young person. You, a butterfly, who have always flitted from one pretty thing to another, with no notion of what money means, or of ever denying yourself anything."

"Charming! Oh, yes, delicious! I don't always find it so myself; but he does. For he is shrewd about everything, keen, subtle, with a mind really good for something, only twisted, distorted, perverted in the oddest fashion imaginable. His mother must have been a queer one; for his father is a gentleman; sharp, rough, crude, but a true gentleman."

"Well, but what did he think you could make of such a creature?"

"I don't know. He was discouraged and disgusted. I suppose he thought I had the few virtues Edgar has n't — as yet — and that I might impart them to him. He wanted me to make him a man of the world, to give him manners and ease and polish and address, and all that sort of thing. He said he wanted me to keep him out of mischief too. It was a lovely bit of irony. It is he who feels bound to keep me out of mischief. And then, he wanted me to marry him."

"To marry him?"

"Oh, yes, that is the prettiest part of it. When Mr. Payne lived in Chicago he had a very intimate friend, named Stanton. This Stanton had an only daughter, who is said to be a lovely girl. Now, the two fathers have always entertained the idea of marrying their children, if it could be brought about. The Stantons have been abroad for two years, and Mr. Payne's plan was, that I should bring Edgar here to Rome, and that he should meet the charming Priscilla. Then, you see, they fall in love at once and the business is done."

"Delightful programme!" laughed Morris.

"Delightful! You can imagine how it is likely to work and what my position is. Shall I say to the young lady: 'This is an oaf, beware of him'? Shall I say: 'This charming youth is guaranteed

to possess all human perfections. Try him and you will immediately order another bottle. If not found in every respect satisfactory, the goods may be thrown back on our hands ' ? ”

“ If the girl is a sensible girl and the fellow is all you make him out to be, I don't think you need say anything to her whatever.”

“ Just so. And what am I to say to Papa Payne ? ”

They smoked on for a few minutes in silence. The sun rose higher, and the white clouds and rolling shadows thickened. The Cook's tourists had long ago gone the way of all such flesh, and the red parasol had flickered itself from view. Other varied groups had wandered in and out, setting their picturesque modern colors against the gray, eternal background.

“ How do you happen to be here now ? ” inquired Morris, at length. “ Why have n't you got your puppy in leash ? ”

“ Heavens, man, don't grudge me a few minutes' breathing space ! If I did n't get it occasionally, I should burst. As for leash, it is he that holds it, not I. Just now he is writing a long letter to his fond papa, describing my shortcomings — especially my extravagance. He can't put up with my extravagance. So I took the opportunity to slip away.”

Another pause and more idle observation of the surroundings.

"How about the Countess Markovski?" asked Morris, again breaking the silence.

"Antonia la bella? Is she here? Ah, don't mention her to me. What have I to do with countesses any more, and princesses, and such cattle? Does she ever speak of me?"

"Never."

"Forgotten!"

"On the contrary, remembered. If she had forgotten you, she would be sure to inquire after you frequently."

"Ah, I see, still wise in the ways of women."

"No, my friend, not Solomon, the typical *ami des femmes*, could boast of being that; but anxious to learn, anxious to learn."

"Well, I have put all such thoughts behind me," said the troubled tutor. "My ears are sealed forever to the voice of the serpent. But I must be about my business. My precious charge is waiting."

The artist packed up his paraphernalia; and the two young men, descending the steps leisurely, left the amphitheatre, and made their way towards the Piazza di Spagna.

CHAPTER II

MRS. BARTON RECEIVES

A FEW days after the above interview, Gordon received cards for himself and his charge for Mrs. Barton's Thursday evenings. Mrs. Barton was Morris's aunt. She was a stout, elderly personage, who, at something over forty, had married a wealthy bachelor of fifty-five. After they had lived contentedly together for ten years, Mr. Barton died suddenly of pneumonia and left his wife mistress of over half a million dollars. She was, therefore, "rich, fortunate, and jolly," as old Burton says, and set herself to travel the remaining stages of life's journey with as much variety and amusement as abundant means and a good digestion would afford her. She was a perfectly ordinary person, with an extraordinary desire to be thought otherwise, which was the most ordinary thing about her. She was inclined to literature, and had published several volumes of verse, the illustrations of which were charming. She loved also to appear as a female Mæcenæ, and to gather around her such literary men, painters, sculptors, musicians, etc., as liked a good dinner and a little flattery, to be paid for in kind. There were a few of this description

then at Rome, and I daresay there are still — and elsewhere.

The atmosphere of Mrs. Barton's Thursdays was a sort of imitation Bohemianism. We respectable people tasted there the divine pleasure of Lazarus, reposing in Abraham's bosom and viewing the damned afar off. We felt that it was all just a little fast, even when it was abominably slow. Mrs. Barton boasted that her position was such that she could invite every one: the white sheep, with the very heaviest fleece, because they were the proper thing; the black sheep from pure Christian charity; and even a goat or two occasionally, since we all take more joy in one sinner that repenteth, or even that may repent, than in ninety and nine that have never gone astray. Mrs. Barton belonged to that not uncommon species of woman, which, while living and breathing by convention and nothing else, loves to boast that it is emancipated from all social prejudices.

On the first Thursday evening after Gordon had received his card, Mrs. Barton was sitting in her drawing-room, ready for all comers. Her apartment, on the Via Sistina, was quietly but luxuriously furnished, in a style which showed preparation for a long residence. The harmonious coloring of the rooms, the careful selection of the pictures (some of them hired, to be sure, but most obtained at a sacrifice from artist friends, for the good lady had a keen eye to business) indicated long training,

if not original taste. Everything was comfortable, with that comfort which only Americans understand.

Mrs. Barton, dressed in plain, but rich black satin, an English matron's cap on her smooth gray hair, chatted idly with Dick Morris, pending the arrival of guests.

"So you think Rob Gordon will come, Richard?"

"Come! Did any one ever know him to stay away from good wine and pretty women?"

"But, this young fellow, Payne" —

"This young fellow, Payne, may come or he may not."

"They do say odd things about him, certainly," murmured Mrs. Barton.

"They certainly do," assented her nephew. "But nothing half odd enough, as you will agree, when you see him. Of all the dry, hopeless, rotten-before-they-'re-ripe specimens — never mind — he may make a Roman lion, after all."

They were interrupted here by the entrance of guests: an American bishop, with his wife and daughter.

Mrs. Barton had traveled with them in Switzerland, and was delighted to secure them for one Thursday at least. The bishop was a stout, light-haired, smooth-faced man, of exceeding affability. His wife was null. His daughter was one of the energetic kind, who manage church fairs and friendly societies. She at once attacked Morris on the con-

dition of the poor in Rome, and sniffed scornfully when he represented himself as one of them.

By this time the rooms were filling up, and Mrs. Barton was rising to the occasion. There were Americans of every description. The millionaire from the West elbowed the professor from Cambridge. Cool young men, with hair parted behind, and London clothes, flirted with airy young ladies from New York and San Francisco. Artists of every kind talked humbly about the weather with possible purchasers, or sneered at humanity in corners, from behind a single eyeglass.

Then there were the English; for Mrs. Barton had lived long in London: English girls, with their stiff backs, and their haughty "no trespassing" expression; English old maids, forever hovering round Romanism, like moths round a candle, and never coming quite near enough to singe their wings; and a real baronet, Sir Thomas Shapleigh, with Lady Shapleigh. It was a joy to hear the Americans "Sir Thomasing" the poor, dull, pompous old man, who looked as if he wished his smart New York wife would let him go home to bed.

There were foreigners too: a Pole, with all the picturesque beggarliness of that charming nation; several Germans, with high mustaches and an opinion of themselves to match; one or two Italian priests, looking for "verts;" a French count, and other Frenchmen and Italians, painters, musicians,

or what not, gesticulating furiously, and ogling the women.

Altogether, it was a gay and jovial scene; and every moment it grew more so, as more people came crowding in. The rooms were hot and close, and the noise of breezy chatter filled the air, now and then a sharp, clear laugh ringing high above the rest. Little groups made their way to the supper-room and partook of salads, ices, and champagne.

One of the most interesting figures was that of a little old man, who could never have been more than five feet four or five, and who was bent and bowed so that he seemed shorter still. His fine white hair waved disorderly about his high forehead; and an expression of childlike, almost saintly simplicity animated his clean-shaven face, with its broad, delicate mouth and deep-set eyes. This was Mr. Edwin Stanton, uncle of the lady who was intended for Gordon's precious charge. Uncle Edwin, as his numerous relatives, and some who were not his relatives, loved to call him, was one of the most curious and delightful objects to be seen in that mixed Roman world. A Puritan of Puritans by birth and early association, brought up in the heart of New England abolitionism and transcendentalism, and fully partaking of both these bygone fanaticisms, he yet mingled with them a peculiar sensitiveness and delicacy, all his own. He would have blended the sweetness of Greece with

the uprightness of Jerusalem ; and in his own person he instinctively did blend them. Morbidly sensitive of conscience, he was morbidly sensitive in æsthetic matters also, and wished that souls and bodies both should be both good and beautiful. He was made up of contradictions, which gave him all his charm. For instance, he believed himself to be, and probably was, unsocial and averse to the company of men ; yet no one had more friends, no one cared more to see his friends and be about among them, no one was more loyal to those he loved, or more interested in all their concerns. Again, no one better loved his home, Concord, and its broad fields and sunny hillsides, and vast meadows stretching out beside the lazy Musketaquid ; yet, when he was in Concord, he always wished he was in Rome ; and, when he was in Rome, he always wished he was in Concord. Doubtless, we all have something of that strain ; but in few is it discernible, in all its variations, with such quaint and adorable simplicity.

This pure and gentle figure seemed almost pitifully out of place in the faded splendors and cheap pretensions of Mrs. Barton's drawing-room. Yet Mr. Stanton evidently enjoyed himself hugely. He traveled from one group to another, with a peculiar, unsteady, ambling gait, which was very characteristic ; made some little, amiable jest, and then rubbed his hands together and chuckled. Everybody greeted him kindly and smilingly, everybody loved him.

"Mr. Stanton," said Mrs. Barton, catching him on one of his peregrinations, "we hear that you have a charming niece coming to Rome shortly."

"I hear so myself," was the genial answer. "But I have never seen her. Her father went West when he was quite young. He has visited us at home from time to time; but Priscilla never has."

"Well, they say she is as pretty as a picture."

"She must get it from her mother, then. Good looks are not the strong point of our family."

"Fie, Mr. Stanton! You always stand up for the family, you know."

"I never like any one to abuse them but myself." And the old gentleman put his hands on his hips, leaned back, and smiled, in a pleasant way he had.

At this point Gordon was seen making his way through the crowd toward Mrs. Barton, followed by a personage who was unmistakably his pupil. It was an odd-looking youth certainly. Tall, heavy, and with a slight stoop about the shoulders, his figure was not otherwise remarkable; but his face was very peculiar. The skin had a dry, withered parchment look, like faded beech leaves in autumn. The features, while not really abnormal, were all distorted and contracted; more, it seemed, as the result of a distorted spirit within, than from any actual, external defect. The eyes, especially, seemed strained with a cunning squint of corkscrew pene-

tration, which suggested that their proprietor was always on the watch against being taken in. They jumped restlessly hither and thither, behind a pair of large glasses ; and, above them, the narrow forehead was wrinkled, as if with perpetual anxious interrogation. The whole was crowned with a limp spread of thin, fine, colorless hair.

It is impossible to imagine a greater contrast than that between this hopeless specimen and the tutor, with his tall, graceful figure, frank, sweet, merry, sympathetic countenance, and laughing blue eyes. And the effect of the natural contrast was immensely heightened by Gordon's comic anxiety and the distressed glances which he occasionally cast at the image of black care pressing on behind him.

Mrs. Barton watched their approach with great interest and amusement, and advanced a few steps to meet them.

"How nice of you to come to me immediately, Mr. Gordon."

"Was n't it?" agreed Gordon, "that is, all things considered. Mrs. Barton, allow me to present my young friend, Mr. Payne."

"How do you do, Mr. Payne," said the lady, extending her hand in gracious fashion.

"How d'ye do," responded the gentleman gruffly, keeping his hand close to his side, and gazing about the room. "Rather fast lot you've got here, have n't you?"

Mrs. Barton squirmed ; but, after all, why should she allow such an animal to disturb her? "I believe you will see all sorts of people in my rooms, Mr. Payne," she answered. "Some, who would hardly get here on their own merits, are tolerated for the sake of their friends."

If she thought this mild shaft would penetrate the rhinoceros's hide, she was sadly mistaken.

"I judged there were a good many here who could n't get in anywhere else," said he.

During this exchange of repartee, Gordon stood by in mild misery. "My young friend has not been about in the world very much, Mrs. Barton," he remarked, at length. "You must pardon something to his inherent idealism."

"Oh! his inherent idealism!" Mrs. Barton echoed.

"That's just like Gordon," interrupted Payne. "He thinks my father hired him to apologize for me everywhere."

"It would be the thirteenth labor of Hercules," murmured the tutor, while his pupil's eyes were again traveling about the room.

But Mrs. Barton turned to uncle Edwin, who had been standing near, looking on rather curiously. "Come, Mr. Stanton, here is Mr. Gordon, whom you surely know, and a young man who, I believe, is looking forward to meeting your niece. Mr. Stanton — Mr. Payne."

Gordon and the old gentleman shook hands,

as old acquaintances. Payne nodded disdainfully. Then, glancing toward a corner of the apartment, he said : " That 's a fine girl over there. I wish some one would introduce me to her."

Mrs. Barton looked. The young lady was from Buffalo, large, black-haired, black-eyed, showy, loud. " After all, his father is worth fifty millions," thought the hostess, " and Miss Porter is not particular. Besides, she can talk even him dead in twenty-five minutes. I shall be doing her a kindness." So she took the young gallant in tow, and deposited him safely beside Miss Porter of Buffalo, who had heard of him and the fifty millions, and consequently condescended to take part in a little graceful badinage, on the universal superiority of America, and the ruin, dirt, and general beastliness of Rome.

Meantime, Gordon, glad of a moment's respite, chatted pleasantly with Mr. Stanton.

" You know my niece ? " asked the latter gentleman.

" I have not had the pleasure of meeting her myself ; but her father and Mr. Payne senior are very old friends, and Mr. Payne was anxious that his son should meet them here. I am told they are charming people."

" I have never yet seen Priscilla ; but I look forward to it with great interest. Mr. Payne senior is Harrison Payne, I suppose ? I knew him, but I never met the son before. He seems a little " —

"Peculiar," interrupted Gordon. "You think so? Other people have noticed it too."

"Why," answered Mr. Stanton, in his mild way, "perhaps a little more contact with the world, a little more polish" —

"Yes, polish is the word, — polish. About a thousand years of continual attrition, with the highest grade of Sapolio — Excuse me, Mr. Stanton. It is my nature to be frank; it is my condition to be tongue-tied; but nature generally prevails with me."

Mr. Stanton smiled a vague smile, as one does on receiving a confidence one does not know what to do with, and changed the subject. "Ah!" said he, "there is the Countess Markovski."

CHAPTER III

THE COUNTESS MARKOVSKI

A FRIEND of mine, whose son had married a young woman from Porto Rico, consoled herself with the remark that her daughter-in-law was part French, part Spanish, part Portuguese, and part English, but she *was* white. The Countess Markovski was white, that is to say, she was Caucasian, though the white was of a rather brunettish description ; but to what nationality, or to how many nationalities, she might have belonged, had never been revealed to man or woman, least of all, probably, to the late Count Markovski, if such a Count there ever were. We hear much of the woman with a past. The Countess Markovski had the credit of so many of them that they clustered round her with a sort of kaleidoscopic blur, and produced on the profane the effect of an unsaintly halo about her head. If you listened to her own version of them, recounted with sweet suavity and naïve grace, they seemed like legends of the Madonna. If her lady acquaintances narrated them, Medusa had not a more hissing coronal.

The Countess Markovski was still young, and

she was certainly beautiful. She was tall and slight; dark eyes, dark hair, long, narrow face, of the kind that seems best described as fox-like. But her charm was in her carriage and manner. There was something willowy and serpentine about her, undulating, a perpetual movement, not nervous or restless, but flowing, graceful, restful. Her eyes, every feature of her face, were full of constant, mobile responsiveness. She seemed to anticipate your thoughts and adapt her own to them, before they were uttered. She had a wonderful frankness and simplicity, wonderful in such a creature, for they seemed perfectly genuine, even to a careful observer. Indeed, they were genuine. The woman was an adventuress, and no one doubted it. She knew no moral law and had no moral sense. The minute you were out of her presence you were as certain of these things as of the light of day. But it seemed as if they were forced upon her by some external evil necessity; while her real nature had the immortal grace and freshness of a child's. The struggle between the two elements of her character gradually told upon her, however; and as Gordon watched her make her graceful way through Mrs. Barton's drawing-room, he thought that, in some indefinable fashion, she had lost just a little, oh, so little, of what she was when he knew her, three years before. The grace was just a grain less spontaneous, the charm a thought less natural; though no one would have

observed it who had not known both grace and charm by heart.

Mrs. Barton, after depositing Payne with Miss Porter, had returned to her central position, near Gordon. He had, therefore, a full view of the Countess's meeting with her hostess.

"O Mrs. Barton," she cried, "how delightfully comfortable your American gatherings always are, like one great family, you know, no stiffness or formality." She spoke perfect English, but with just a hint of accent — some accent. Her French, her German, her Italian had the same touch of foreign color, and a Polish friend once told me that her speech in his language had the same: it was a quaint, strange, murmuring burr, which seemed to make the tongue of every race, not theirs, but hers.

"Your compliments are sweet, Countess," replied Mrs. Barton, "always sweet; but can one trust you?"

"Trust me?" with an expression of injured frankness delightful to behold. "If not me, whom can you trust?"

"Whom indeed?" answered the American lady calmly. "And you are not saying to yourself all the while: 'These Americans, with their crude manners, their off-hand speech, their loud laughter, when will they ever learn the quiet dignity of the old world?'"

"And I, who have never been quiet and never been dignified! Do not talk of the old world to

me. I love the new world, with all its vigor and its freshness, with more life than it knows how to manage. Over here we can't get life enough." Then she turned to Gordon, who was watching her. "So it is you, my friend. Back again in Rome once more? I thought, when you left us last year, it was forever."

"Three years ago, Countess. That is forever — to be absent from — Rome."

Mrs. Barton had slipped away. The Countess settled herself on a sofa; and Gordon stood beside her, leaning over slightly, with the grace that was natural to him.

"Rome!" echoed the lady, with an expression of scorn. "I don't know why we all congregate here. It is old and dirty and desolate, and it seems as if we were perpetually assisting at the funeral of something or other. Those old Greeks and Romans — we bury them first. And then the early Christians — they go down into the grave next, martyrs and apostles and all. And then the Middle-Age popes and cardinals — they were wickedly picturesque, to be sure, but they are dead too, dead — nothing left of it all but bones and dust. Ah!" She muttered all this half to herself, with an expression of real, visual horror; and Gordon watched her with fascinated curiosity.

"You are melancholy, Countess," he said. "What has happened to you? You used to laugh all day long."

"Oh, yes, laugh! How long ago did you say that was? Thirty years? See! My hair is getting gray, and the wrinkles are deep, and I suppose I have got to go after those martyrs and apostles too; only I shall go with the wicked popes and cardinals. I don't wish to; this hideous death-mask of Rome gets on my nerves."

"Really, you ought to talk to my pupil about Rome. He feels just as you do."

"Your pupil!" she cried, sitting up and shifting at once from abandoned despair to intense curiosity. "Your pupil! I've heard of him. Rich, is he not? And an original, is he not? Naïve, simple, the untutored savage, etc., etc.?"

Gordon shrugged his shoulders at all these queries. "Rich he is. Original — if you like. About as naïve as a Jew old-clothes dealer, and simpler. But do not slander the untutored savage. Here he comes. May I present him to you?"

Edgar had discussed the charms of America and the tiresomeness of Rome for some time, to his own satisfaction, and, apparently, to Miss Porter's. At any rate, that young lady had echoed him with much complaisance and seeming sympathy. Perhaps her previous knowledge of her interlocutor and of his father's fortune assisted a little in keeping her under the charm. But, all at once, Edgar looked up and saw his tutor conversing with the Countess.

"By Jove!" he cried. "Who's Gordon got hold

of now? That's a swell, is n't it? He need n't think he's paid to talk to women like that, while I look on."

"And talk to me?" inquired Miss Porter, a little acidly. But the young man had already left her standing by herself, without listening to the explanation she would gladly have offered him as to the dark stranger.

"Allow me to present my young friend, Mr. Payne, Countess," began Gordon. "Edgar, this is the Countess Markovski."

It was the young barbarian's first encounter with a title, and he really bowed quite low in response to the lady's gracious smile.

"Mr. Gordon tells me you don't like Rome," said the Countess.

"No, ma'am, I don't. That's true enough. But you must n't believe everything Gordon tells you about me."

"Really? I have always thought Mr. Gordon a very truthful person."

"And you look pretty sharp, too," observed the youth, in a tone in which disgust and admiration were obviously mingled.

"Mr. Gordon, your character is attacked. Can't you protect yourself?"

"No, Countess. I leave it in your hands, and may Heaven defend the right." The tutor turned on his heel and walked off.

The Countess's manner, which had been a bit

chilly and external hitherto, warmed gently and almost imperceptibly. It seemed as if a vague atmosphere of tenderness and grace flowed from her every look and gesture. "Sit down by me, Mr. Payne," she said, "and tell me why you don't like Rome and why you long to be back in your own far country. Do you know, I believe we feel a little alike? Rome wearies me too. I hunger for something fresh and strong and real."

He sat down by her and wondered how he could feel easy and at home with a countess. "That's it, ma'am," he began.

"Don't call me ma'am," she interrupted. "When you speak to a person with a title, you should say, 'Countess,' or 'Prince,' or what not. You don't mind my advising you in this frank way?"

"Mind it, Countess?" And the cold green eyes were fixed on her with a look of astonished admiration. He had never been talked to like this before. What did it mean?

"I hoped you would n't," she said, and went on speaking with a low, indescribable murmur, which lured him away from his usual boorish loquacity. "I hoped you would n't; because ever since I heard that you did n't like this tedious old world I have felt drawn to you, if you don't mind my saying so. You can feel with me how foolish these people are to waste their money in coming way over here and falling down before stocks and stones."

"By Jove, they do waste their money!" was the approving comment.

"And what for?" she went on, in the same strange tone, monotonous, yet musical, "what for? Always the past, the dead, hoary, dusty past. Give me the present, give me life, not death. I want change, I want movement, hurrying, shifting, wearying, blinding movement, never to rest — rest is death. But I must seem quite distracted — a stranger, too." She dropped her intimate grace and chilled again.

"Go on! Go on!" he cried. "You talk just like a book. Why don't you come to America? This is n't the place for you. Everything moves there and everybody. I never lived in the same house two years. If you want change, why not try the stock market? Did you ever? There's nothing like it."

"Stock market?"

"Exchange, Bourse, they call it here. It's great, I tell you. My father made his money that way. And I've done a little at it myself."

"You? How clever you must be, at your age."

"I'm not so young, you know; I tell you I worked consolidated lead for the dollars last spring. I heard father talking about a big bear deal that was on, and I went short for a hundred shares. That's big for me. It was great. There was one time my heart was in my boots; but out she came with a big profit."

"Does Mr. Gordon take an interest in the stock market?"

"Gordon! He does n't know a ticker from a telephone. I don't believe he ever was in a bucket-shop in his life. Gordon! Now I'll tell you something" —

Just then Mr. Stanton came trotting up to the Countess. Nothing could be more curious than his attitude toward that lady. He had known her in Rome and elsewhere for several years; and she always treated him with a gentle deference and sympathy that completely won his heart. She listened with reverential interest to stories about his dear anti-slavery heroes, and paid for them with others, not true, but admirably well-invented, about the martyrs of Polish liberty. He had heard all the scandal regarding her; but he never believed anything against his friends; and, indeed, he had that beautiful wisdom of the children of light, which the children of this world call folly, and which consists in being unwilling to believe evil of any one.

Now, as he came up to the two sitting on the sofa, Payne leaned back and stared at the intruder with a frown; but the Countess rose quickly and advanced a step forward.

"O Mr. Stanton! You in Rome again? How lovely. Just in time to tell me all about the new discoveries and those fascinating things they have been digging up in the Forum." You would think

she really loved and revered the old man ; and I have no doubt she did.

"How do you do, Countess? I'm afraid you can't make me believe that young ladies like you care for ruins and archæology. Leave that for the human ruins."

"How can you speak so? As if you were not much, much younger than I! Love and joy and hope cannot be touched by years."

This was not the sort of thing that Payne cared for ; and he even stared at the Countess in amazement ; for she seemed like a different being from the one who had just murmured low and sweetly in his ear. Her manner now was so frank and genuine and cordial, more that of a man greeting an old and respected teacher than that of a subtle coquette. This change was wholly annoying to the embryo stock speculator, and he rose awkwardly, turned, and was moving away.

"O Mr. Payne," called the Countess to him gently, "don't forget to come and see me. Via Ludovisi 24. I want to hear more of what you were telling me."

Payne muttered something inaudible, as he walked off.

"I hope I have n't interrupted a serious conversation," said Mr. Stanton smiling.

"Oh, dear, no. Some of your countrymen are so odd. Come now, Mr. Stanton, sit down and tell me what you have been doing all this long while."

Meantime, Payne wandered off to seek his tutor ; but he was some time in finding him ; for Gordon had fallen into the hands of Dick Morris and half a dozen other young people, some known to him and others not, who had carried him off to the little music room, shut the door, and commanded him to sing the latest comic song from home.

"But I came away three months ago ; and I don't know anything that is n't as passé as a last Easter bonnet."

"Oh, but most of us are wearing our last Easter bonnets."

"Besides, I get all my songs from the Music Halls, and very many of them are — not fit to be sung in the presence of ladies."

"But in Italy, you know, — besides, all we care for is the music."

So they dragged him to the piano ; and he gave them song after song, of the somewhat dubious quality characteristic of the variety stage at present ; while the young ladies and gentlemen nearly went into convulsions, simply because of his manner of doing it. For he sang the vulgar stuff with a touch of refinement that made it inimitably droll. His fingers strayed over the keys, striking a tender chord here and there. Now and then he wiped his hands with his handkerchief, laying it on the rack beside him, after the fashion of great pianists. And he rambled from one scrap of nonsense to another, with the perfect ease which gave his every act a charm.

But just as he reached the second stanza of "There'll be whiskey at Mullaly's wake to-night," the door opened in front of him, and Payne intruded his visage of dashed interrogation. Gordon's drollery went out, like an electric light. He finished the stanza, but in a style as dead as the matter merited. Then he stood up.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, the concert will be continued another time, with new and fresh airs, and innumerable variations. Ready to go home, Edgar?"

"Yes," muttered Edgar gruffly, and walked off. Gordon followed him, just turning on the wondering company a glance of humorous disgust.

CHAPTER IV

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE

GORDON was naturally of a most placid and amiable disposition ; but for that very reason, when he was irritated he had little power of controlling himself. Now it would have been impossible for any saint in Heaven to live with such a creature as Edgar Payne and not to lose his temper irrecoverably. The tutor was, therefore, in a constant state of mild exasperation, which broke out at every opportunity.

“ How can you expect me to take you about with me anywhere, when you behave as you have this evening ? ” asked he, as they walked rapidly homeward, through the quiet streets.

“ Don’t expect you to take me everywhere. I can take myself about.”

“ I am sorry to say your father expects me to.”

“ My father had better stick to the stock market. He’s good at that. The worst speculation he ever got into was you.”

“ Very likely.”

They went on for a while in silence. Their lodgings were near the Porta Pia, which gave them a good deal of walking, when they did not care to

use the tram. Gordon had objected to this and would have preferred the older part of the city ; but the rooms were comfortable and a bargain, and Payne had insisted on taking them.

"That was a queer crowd she had there," began Payne, at length. The recollection of the Countess warmed his heart to unusual communicativeness.

"There were all sorts of people, of course."

"Oh, all sorts of people — yes — I think so. Come, Gordy, you can't fool me, you know. You think I have n't been about much ; but I can tell a tough when I see him. That's just the kind I *can* tell."

"Well, I allow, there's something in that."

"None of your insinuations. You're just as tough as I am ; only you cover it up with that slick manner of yours. I see through you, as if you were an opera-glass."

"I dare say."

"As for Mrs. Barton herself, she knows a thing or two. And that Countess — what did they call her ?"

"Markovski, you mean ?"

"I suppose so. I say, what is she, now ?"

"You must ask somebody that knows."

"I guess you know ; but I can find out without your telling me."

"She is a lady who would make no more of eating you up than a first-class royal Bengal tiger would."

“Oh, ho! Hear the man. He thinks I’m so green, and I’m as wise as Solomon compared to him. Eat me up! That has been tried before, my friend; and it did n’t work. Eat me up!”

Resentment at this cannibal suggestion kept the young gentleman so occupied that he entered his apartment without even a good-night.

The interview with the Countess Markovski had carried Gordon back three years and touched the memory of the deepest feelings he had ever known. At that time, almost a boy and utterly ignorant of her true character, he had loved this woman, had given her the purest and most ideal devotion that he was capable of, and had asked her to marry him, although he was perfectly unable to support even himself, let alone a wife. She had laughed at him a little, caressed him a little, loved him a little, half accepted him, at least he thought so. Then, one day when he returned to Rome after a short trip to Naples, he found her gone, vanished, not a word or sign left to comfort him. What he heard of her afterwards, when he had come to his senses, made him appreciate his good luck; but he still cherished the memory, not of her, but of his own love for her.

Under these circumstances, their meeting had impressed him strangely, half painfully. She seemed the same woman and yet another. His first impulse was to avoid her as much as possible, to keep the memory of the vanished ideal clear and sacred.

Yet, at the same time, he was teased by that odd curiosity which leads us to probe old wounds, which makes it a pleasure to talk over past loves with the objects of them, to say, if you had done so and I had done so, it would have all been different. That he should again love the Countess Markovski hardly occurred to him as possible. Did he wish to see her and tell her so? He did not know. This state of uncertainty continued for a few days, but was sharply terminated by the receipt of a small perfumed note, with a black coronet, hinting that courtesy required of him a speedy visit to No. 24 Via Ludovisi. What could he do but act on the hint at once?

Everything about the Countess's dwelling suggested mystery, as she herself did. The servants were all dressed in black and seemed exceptionally still and unobtrusive. The rooms, without being in the least dismal, were full of dim corners and curtained recesses, shadowy, even in the bright afternoons. The pictures and books seemed old and quiet. The sense of indefinable, languorous restfulness which accompanied the mistress, even when she was most animated, extended itself to every corner of her habitation. It was not in this special place that Gordon had known her before. No face of the servants, no bit of furniture or picture on the walls, came back to him as an actual memory. Yet as he entered the door he felt at home. The strangely personal atmosphere was what he had

known so well in days gone by. As he sat in the salon, waiting for his hostess to appear, he leaned back with his eyes closed; and it seemed to him that the past three years were but a dream.

He heard the faint rustle of garments behind him and rose quickly. The Countess was dressed in black. She was always dressed in black, except for a single bit of bright color, now in one spot, now in another. This time it was a small dark red bow at her throat. She wore no jewels but her wedding ring and on the same finger one large opal, which shimmered and sparkled in the dim light. Again and again this flicker of vague brilliance would draw your eyes to the long, white, sinuous fingers, which were never at rest.

She greeted Gordon with a brief word, then, without speaking further, sat down on a sofa, and motioned him to the corner beside her. There was no smile at all on her face; just a look of grave and far-away abstraction.

Gordon watched her for a second with curious interest. It was painful, but fascinating to appreciate now as wonderfully clever, even if only half-conscious acting, all those varying moods and attitudes and gestures which he remembered so well and which had imposed so perfectly on his inexperienced innocence. The art was so subtle and so delicate that he was not in the least surprised at having been entrapped — nor ashamed of it.

“Well,” he began, at length. “Here I am.”

She turned and looked him full in the face with sudden, bitter animation. "Yes," she said. "Here you are. And you think I sent for you. And you think I wanted you. And you don't know whether to love me or not. And you wonder whether I love you. I wonder too. I wanted to find out."

"The faculty of divination has descended upon you, O fair Antonia."

She crossed her hands about her knee, leaned forward, and gazed at him intently. His eyes traveled from hers down to the opal and back again.

"No," she murmured, "I hardly think so; I hardly think so. Have you changed much? Have n't you grown hard and cynical and scornful? Oh, I have. I am all those things. You need n't laugh at me. But you were so different, so sweet, and fresh, and gentle. You could n't be like that always; and that was what I loved in you. Well, never mind. Let us leave all that now. Tell me about yourself and what you have been doing." She settled back into the corner of the sofa, and looked at him, with the cold indifference of a society belle, making the same request of a long-lost acquaintance.

"What have I been doing? Nothing. Nothing useful, at any rate." The Countess made a slight gesture of disgust, as if the word suggested housemaids and elderly females engaged in charity. "I've earned a little money, and spent a good deal. I've loafed. I've laughed."

She nodded approvingly. "And loved?" she said.

"No, not loved. I've been mainly in Boston."

"Ah; and one does not love in Boston?"

"Not without an income."

"And does n't one love an income — occasionally?"

"Oh, yes. I suppose I shall come to that some day; but I have n't yet."

"But you have seen plenty of pretty women?"

"Yes, I've seen them and painted them. None prettier than the one I see at this moment."

"Painted them? To be sure. And how is painting with you now?"

"'Dead,' Countess, 'forsook, cast off.' I have abandoned the brush altogether, and taken to modeling in clay."

"I see; and you have brought your *chef d'œuvre* out here with you, to excite our languid Roman admiration. He is bound to be a nine days' wonder."

"Is n't he? *Monumentum exegi ære perennius*. I have made a monument more so than brass. Excuse the pedantry, Countess; but it was so apt."

"Tell me about the youth. Why should you be a slave to him? Did you paint his mother?"

"Not his mother, his aunt. From all I hear, I fancy his mother attended to matters of that kind herself. I should like to see you and his aunt to-

gether. I do love contrasts. I can imagine now how you would flatter and imitate her stiff Puritanism."

"You think I am an actor, then?"

"An adorable one."

"Yet, for the moment, I am always what I seem. But you have n't answered my question. Why are you a slave to the youth?"

"It is a foolish question for a clever woman. I am poor, and the youth's father is rich. You ought to see his father. He is a man. What would you make of him, I wonder. Yes, he is a man. What an eye! What a grasp of things! And all wasted on the piling up of money."

"I should like to pile up money."

"No, you would n't. You would like the power of it, and to have it at your beck and call, and to see people cringe and flatter you, and to tread on their necks; but you would n't like to spend day and night figuring, and planning, and worrying, as Mr. Payne does. A man who is really worthy to enjoy himself, too!"

Antonia was lying back now, with her hands clasped behind her head, watching the pleasant face beside her. For it was a pleasant face always, and always on the brink of merriment. "You admire the father, but you don't like the son?" she said idly.

"Oh, no, I don't like the son. You remember something of me, enough to know I can be happy

almost anywhere and under any circumstances. I was baptized in sunshine, I think sometimes, when I find other people long-faced and gloomy, with no occasion for being so that I can see. But this fellow is almost too much for me. So lean as he is, so angular, and so worthless, so full of dark corners, with little ugly spiders of spite and malice constantly bobbing out of them — and so vulgar — it sours me, it does, really. All the sunshine is getting soaked out of me, as if I lived in a damp fog.”

She gazed off beyond him and drank the murmur of his words. “Baptized in sunshine, baptized in sunshine,” she kept repeating softly to herself. “What was I baptized in, I wonder? Some cold, and strange, and subtle planetary dew. Yet there was a shred of sunlit mist about it also. For I love the sunlight, oh, I love it; and the grave seems to me so harsh and horrible.”

Then she spoke to him directly, but low and softly, with that strange, siren whisper, which she so well knew how to use, or used so well without knowing.

“Do you remember, Rob, that day — that day, when you told me you loved me? I shall never forget it — that May day — how soft it was — soft — soft. The old vetturino — how he nodded on his seat, while we drove and drove — leisurely — why should we have hastened? The sky was so blue above us. And the great, open Campagna spread away about us, drenched in sunlight. And

the air was full of the breath of spring. Do you remember?"

She ceased; but her voice still echoed in his ears, as he leaned back and wondered whether such things really ever were. Then there was a great silence about them; and they sat there quiet in the dim room, hardly moving, or even breathing.

She spoke first, leaning forward sharply, with the grace banished from her manner and a something almost bitter in her tone: "No, you don't remember. How should you? When did a man ever remember? What a fool I am to think you should not be as other men! Why did you come here? Why?"—

"Antonia," he interrupted gently, "it is my turn to ask whether you remember? Do you remember the boy, the child, whom you bewitched, and played with, and deserted—who was so lamentably innocent as to believe in your innocence, and true enough to believe in your truth—who would have been ashamed to ask you to love him, except as his wife, and who offered you his name and his honor—not much, to be sure, but all he had? You soothed him and caressed him and promised. Do you remember?—Yes, I remember that day when we drove together. I remember another day, also, when, after a brief two weeks' absence, I returned to Rome and found you gone—and where—and with whom? And what have I heard about you since? There was a dream shattered and an

idol broken. People say I forget easily, but I remember that. Antonia, do you?"

She heard him patiently, without a sound, without once raising her eyes to look at him; and when he had finished, she remained, for a moment, in the same position of abandoned hopelessness. Then, pulling herself together defiantly, she said: "Boys and girls' folly! One cannot dream forever on nothing. What I did was best for both of us. Anyway, it is all gone now. What is the use of memories when they sting you?" She made a gesture as of brushing a swarm of bees from about her head. Then, after a little pause, she added in a gentler, softer tone, "But, O Rob! O Rob! I missed you so!"

Here, however, she was forced to stop abruptly; for the servant opened the door for Mr. Edgar Payne.

CHAPTER V

THE WOLF AND THE LAMB

EDGAR had been meditating a visit to No. 24 Via Ludovisi ever since his evening at Mrs. Barton's. The Countess had pleased him. He had his own ideas as to women. They were to have snap and go about them, and also to be fascinating, devilish fascinating. Now the Countess Markovski was fascinating, devilish fascinating. He thought she had the snap and go. She had certainly taken a fancy to him, which might be worth indulging. Then, she was a countess. Like all of us true-born Americans, he did love the sound of a title. It tickled his ears, as sweets did his palate. To be the prime favorite of a countess was well worth crossing a street or two, — if it cost nothing more.

After his rebuff from Gordon, he had tried to make some further inquiries about the lady, but not very successfully. His own acquaintances in Rome were Americans, and not of a class likely to help him much. He ventured to sound Dick Morris, when that idle young gentleman was visiting Gordon; but he had been sharply snubbed. He generally was snubbed by Gordon's friends, and hated them accordingly, and him also, all the more.

Finally, after two or three days of reflection, he decided to venture boldly into the siren's grotto. He thought he could get out again somehow. Indeed, the memory of those bewitching eyes haunted him so much that he did not especially care about getting out again, if he could only get in. He was somewhat uncertain about the proper hour for such a visit; but the middle of the afternoon seemed to be fairly safe. If he did not succeed then, he would try again.

Perhaps none of the three was especially pleased to see the others at that moment. Gordon's countenance openly expressed his disgust. Payne hesitated somewhat as he approached the Countess. She, however, was, as usual, perfect mistress of herself and the situation.

"Ah, Mr. Payne," she said, as she held out her hand to him, "it is so good of you to leave sight-seeing for a while and come to me. Mr. Gordon and I have been talking about you."

"I dare say. Trust Gordon for that — and no good of me either."

"Why should you suppose we would slander the absent?"

"I don't know anything about you. You may be different from all the others. But he could n't say anything good of me, if he tried."

"I certainly shan't try at present," remarked the tutor. "Countess," he went on, "I don't believe I am needed just now. May I say *au revoir*?"

"Must you leave us?" she answered amiably, but with what he thought a rather strange coquetry. "Are n't you afraid we shall talk about you?"

"Not at all. One thing I can say about the young man. He could n't abuse me more behind my back than he does to my face."

"I don't know that," muttered his pupil, as Gordon left the room.

When they were alone, the Countess sat down again on the sofa. Payne, who was coolness itself, made a half-move toward sitting down beside her; but she, not discourteously, but authoritatively, pointed to a chair a little farther off. She did not intend him to forget his distance so soon. He was annoyed at this and spoke with sudden roughness: "See here, what has that fellow been telling you about me?"

"I never betray my friends," said Antonia quietly.

"Is he your friend?"

"Yes," was the simple answer.

It appeared that jealousy was added to the elements already present in the frown darkening the young gentleman's brow. He did not speak for a moment. Neither did his hostess, as she sat, quiet and cool, in the corner of her sofa, letting the white hands pass over each other slowly and softly. At length he said: "Confound that chap! He's interfered with me in everything, since the first day I set eyes on him. Why in the world did my father

put him over me? I would n't stand it an hour; only, you know, I've got to. If you knew my father! I ain't afraid of much, but I am afraid of him. He's just like iron, my father is. If I was to make a fuss, and punch Gordon's head, and start on my own hook, the old man might never speak to me again. It would be just like him. But that Gordon, he's the most good-for-nothing rascal you ever saw. Spend? Why, I don't think he knows a dime from a dollar. Never saved a cent in his life. Lazy? Why, an Irishman shoveling for the city government at two dollars a day is n't so lazy as he is. But everybody says he's a gentleman and they say I'm not. Damn it, what is a gentleman? And the women all like him. Now look at you here—you were as sweet as sirup to me the other night; and now he's come and talked to you, and you won't look at me at all."

"Oh, yes, I will. I've been looking at you all the time." So she had, with amusement, amazement. It was an odd fish certainly, an ugly one. She had never yet come across such an one in all her wide experience. It would be a real curiosity to investigate and classify the creature, even if it came to nothing. "I will look at you. And I like you."

The frowning brow relaxed and the pale green eyes were raised to hers. She was looking at him intently, frankly, with a hint of a smile, but kind and sympathetic.

"Suppose we put Mr. Gordon aside, for a little while," she began. "I think we can find something pleasanter to talk about."

"Sure," was the grim assent.

"Tell me about yourself."

"Tell me about yourself," he answered promptly. "I've been trying to find out something about you for the last three days."

The youth might be a monster; but he was not a fool; that was evident. Even she was taken aback for a second and dropped her eyes before the impudence of the pale green ones. "I am glad I interested you so much," she said, with simple gentleness. "But all that will come later. You are a man, you know, and should speak first."

"What shall I say?"

"Well, you were born of poor but honest parents, I suppose?"

"No, I was born in Chicago. There are some poor people in Chicago, I believe; but no honest ones. I never saw any anywhere; only those who pretend to be and those who don't. I don't know anything about my mother. My father was awfully rich then. He's richer now. I never heard him say anything about honesty. Lately we've lived in Boston. I'm sure I don't know why. I hate Boston."

"Did you go to school?"

"Of course I went to school. Oh, you mean boarding school. Yes, I did. I went for two years,

just before I came out here — I was twenty-one last June — to a big school in the East. And a mean place it was. Prayers morning and night — just think of it. Have to go, you know. And a lot of Greek and Latin and stuff — what good is it, any way? Never helped a man to make a dollar. My father wanted me to go to college, but I told him, not much. What's college good for?"

"Didn't you make any friends at school?" It may easily be imagined that the Countess took not the slightest interest in the facts thus agreeably narrated; but every word and every grimace was throwing new light on the curious character she had to study. She was like the naturalist, who pokes his spider with a pin and makes him throw out this leg and that in huge uncouthness.

"Friends? Now, really, sometimes I can't make out whether you are a tenderfoot or not. What has a practical man got to do with friends? Friends are people that want something of you. If you're weak, you've got to have 'em; because you want something of everybody. If you're strong and good for fighting, they're only a bore. I have n't got a friend in the world, and don't want one."

"You don't wish to be friends with me, then?"

"Pshaw! That's different. You don't call that being friends?"

The glance that accompanied this led her to say hastily, "But at school?"

"Oh, at school. You would n't ask me to be friends with such a crowd as that. They could n't think of anything but football. You don't suppose I would play football? Why should a fellow want to go and get his head knocked in for nothing? They call me a coward. So I am—who is n't? I'm not afraid to say so. I don't like to be hurt. But give me something to be hurt for. I'd charge an army for the sake of getting a gold mine. They did n't like me at school. The first year they thought they were sending me to Coventry and all that. As if I cared. I just stayed in my room and read the stock quotations and the financial articles. I tell you I know something about 'em, too. I don't believe there's a listed stock in the market to-day that I could n't tell you the history of; and I could tell you some queer things about some unlisted ones. You see my father's right on to all those things, and he gives me pointers. I've kept tabs on the whole business. Oh, you'd just enjoy that sort of thing."

"I'm sure I should." She thought of men who had talked to her about that sort of thing before, men who would have devoured this innocent lamb at a meal, men who held the exchanges of Europe in their pockets and blew the fate of empires from their cigars. She had often thought she should enjoy that sort of thing, when the time should come for it. Yes, this odd little beast might be worth listening to in the end. So she listened.

"The last year I was at school," he went on, "the fellers got to thinking more of me. I taught 'em a thing or two that was more fun than Latin, you see. I showed 'em what business meant. Finally, I ran a regular little bucket-shop, and I tell you they went into it. Why, I made nearly a hundred dollars in three weeks. That was fun. That was worth going to school for. But the teachers got on to it; turned me out at last. What did I care?"

He was wound up now, and could go on forever. That was evident. She leaned back in her corner, and listened gravely to the torrent of coarse slang and dull anecdotes, all the gross experience of a crude, half-baked, cross-grained temper, never subjected to any education but that of fortuitous circumstance, not ill-fitted to beat a rough way for itself to a certain sort of success, but wholly incapable of charm, or grace, or attractiveness, incapable even of the appreciation of such things. Now and then she put in a word of grave sympathy. Not very much was needed. Still, she drew him on more and more.

"And what are you doing over here?" she asked, when there came a pause. "You don't get at much business in Rome."

"Well, no. You see, father would have me come. He thought he ought to get education into me somehow — what he calls education. He can't do it, you know; but he said, if I'd come over

here for a year, when I came back, he'd give me a hundred thousand dollars and a start, let me into one or two big deals. That's worth while. I know he's working up a tin-can trust that has got money in it, oh, money — You see, I'll be in that for the dollars every time. Then there's a girl over here that he wants me to marry."

"To marry?" There was just a little gleam in the dark eyes.

"Marry's the word. Name's Stanton. Father old friend of his. She's got money, lots of it. And they do say she's pretty. Could n't touch me, if she was n't. I don't know about marrying, yet awhile. Want to see all the pretty women first."

"You like pretty women?" she said. "Which do you like best, them or money?"

"Money, of course. But they come next."

His brutal frankness rather attracted her. "What sort of pretty women do you like?"

"Pretty women just like you," he said. As he said it, he got up determinedly from his chair and came over on to the sofa beside her. Then he took her hand. There was a moment's pause, just enough for her to feel the clammy, serpent pressure of his grasp, just enough for her to give him one mysterious glance — of curiosity, of interest, of tenderness? That was for him to speculate about later. Then she rose, as frigid as an Easter lily, or a morning shower-bath. "I have chatted with

you too long. I should have been on the Pincian by this time. My carriage is always ready at half-past four."

He was forced to rise also, and stood, awkward and frowning, beside her. "Here have I been giving myself away for an hour, as if I were being interviewed for a morning daily. You promised to tell me something too."

"Did I? That must be for another time, I am afraid. You have been so interesting. By the way — can you ride?"

"I should think so. My father had a stock farm. When I was a kid, I was out there half the time. I can ride anything."

"Well, then, ride with me some afternoon in the Campagna. I love to get out into pure, bare desolation away from all this canned desolation here. Let me see, to-day is Monday. Come Friday, at one o'clock. The afternoons are so short now. I will be ready for you. Will you?"

"Sure, I will." And with this he was obliged to take a grumbling leave, while the lady went to prepare for her daily drive.

CHAPTER VI

THE CASTING OF PEARLS

FOR the next two or three days matters went on much as usual. Gordon said nothing to Edgar about the Countess, further than to inquire if he had enjoyed his call; to which the cheerful response was, "Did you?" The tutor had the matter somewhat on his mind, however. Was he responsible for the young man's acquaintances? Probably he was. If not, what was he responsible for? The word had lately come to be to him the most hateful in the language; so that he positively envied that unfortunate class of persons who are usually referred to as "not responsible." Meantime, it was quite clear that the expression was applicable to the case in hand, if to anything. But then, what was he to do about it? To forbid Edgar's frequenting the Countess's would be preposterous, and simply mean doubling the number of his visits. To hint gently that her surroundings were not all that could be desired for a young and innocent gentleman would be hardly more effective, even with a person to whom that description applied; and Payne was neither a gentleman, nor young, nor innocent. Besides, in spite of his present

knowledge of the Countess's character, Gordon still felt the deepest tenderness, not for her, but for his past worship of her. To discuss her shadowy career, to analyze her dubious peculiarities, especially with such a creature as Edgar, would be intolerably painful.

After all, what harm was likely to be done? Edgar was intrusted to his care to be shown the world. Now the Countess was certainly the world, the flesh, and the devil. "Not to have seen her would be to have left unseen a wonderful piece of work, which, not to have been blessed withal, would have much discredited your travel," murmured the tutor to himself. Odd company was, of course, to be met at her house; but then, odd company was to be met at Mrs. Barton's; in fact, almost anywhere. There was no fear of Edgar's losing money at cards. In the first place, it would make no great difference if he did, as the supply was very abundant. Then, he was quite sure not to play any game which he did not understand, and was much more likely to fleece than to be fleeced, even by the adepts who visited the Countess Markovski. Indeed, Gordon's chief fear was that he might be detected in some sort of cheating, which would bring a scandal on everybody; but he concluded that his pupil was too knowing for that. So, after giving the subject some slight attention, he decided that there was no very great need of his doing anything, and nothing whatever that he

could do. Perhaps Edgar, by the sacrifice of a little of the peachy bloom of his youthful simplicity, might in the end acquire a faint tinge of that worldly polish, which was so dear an object in his father's eyes, and which Gordon had no longer much hope that he himself would be able to communicate.

Meanwhile, the tutor still made heroic efforts, in every way he could, to impart some of the desired culture. He bullied or persuaded Payne to visit one and another of the sights, and tried to inspire him with some slight interest in antiquity or art. The attempt was perfectly vain. The only thing that aroused even a spark of enthusiasm in his dull and sodden spirit was the charming depiction of tortures in Santo Stefano Rotundo. That he inspected with persistent curiosity, examining and analyzing every picture, till Gordon's patience and stomach almost gave way. But in the Forum, the Palatine, the Colosseum, the Baths of Caracalla, the sculpture and picture galleries, he found nothing whatever to admire, and simply annoyed and disgusted whoever accompanied him with comments, which were, to be sure, occasionally acute, but were always crude, loud, boorish, and insolent.

Yet he was generally willing enough to go to such places; for he had nothing else to do. If he had been at a hotel full of English and Americans, his money would have found him companions and

occupations of a certain sort ; but living in lodgings, he was left to himself and the long-suffering Gordon. The afternoons he spent in perusing the papers, eagerly searching for such stale financial information as they supplied. His father sent him the New York journals ; and the reading of these, and of the telegraphic items in *Galignani*, kept him busy for several hours. He took a certain interest, also, in European stock markets, followed the fluctuations in London, Paris, and Berlin, and had even begun to do a little business in Italian securities, although the Roman Bourse was tantalizing, like the view of the Promised Land afar off, since he could not follow a word of the transactions. But in the mornings he was usually willing to go on some expedition, provided he was not too much bored with explanations, was allowed to stare his fill at the pretty girls, and above all, was not put to any expense. He insisted on doing all the sights on the free days only ; and fretted over unnecessary fees, as if he were losing a tooth.

On the Thursday following the visit at the Countess's, the two young men were strolling through the Vatican sculpture galleries. In regard to sculpture Payne was simply hopeless. He did occasionally see a picture which he condescended to approve of, always the worst which could by any possibility be found — say, the waxy smoothness of *Sassoferrato*, or a limp virgin of *Carlo Dolce*, or a frenzied atrocity of *Annibale Caracci*.

"That's got some life in it," he would say. "That's American." But sculpture was naught to him. Gordon had brought him to the Vatican, therefore, simply as a matter of duty, and because he himself loved to ramble about through the long galleries, catching a glimpse here and there of an old favorite and paying no attention to the savage tirade that went on beside him, except now and then to exasperate it by a word of appreciation or delight.

"The Laocoön," said he, as they paused in front of it. "That ought to suit you."

"You think you know my bad taste pretty well by this time. I suppose it does n't suit you?"

"No, not that altogether. It does suit me in a way; but you like things that have life in them, you know."

Edgar surveyed the statue critically for a moment. "Bully for the snake," he cried, and passed on.

The Apollo Belvedere caught his eye with a reminiscence of the Boston Music Hall. "Hello! They've got him out here, have they? Well now, that's something like; though there's more things at home it would pay them to copy than statues."

"Do you really suppose this is a copy of the Apollo at home?"

"It don't make any difference to you what I suppose, does it?"

Gordon stopped a moment before the famous torso. "Edgar," he began, "if you really want to

learn anything about what Greek art is and what sculpture is, just look at this for a while."

Payne gazed at him in unspeakable disgust. "Gordy," he answered, "I think sometimes you take me for a fool; but I'm not enough of a one to think you're enough of a one to care about a thing like that. What is it but a piece of dirty marble, knocked and battered till you can't tell whether it's a man or a horse-block? I wish Mark Twain was here. He'd make you see what an ass you are." With this crushing reference to the high priest of Philistine laughter, he walked on.

Through the vast length of the Museo Chiaramonti they loitered leisurely, Gordon sometimes making an honest, futile, and ridiculous effort to interest his companion, whose attention was chiefly directed to a group of young English women walking in front of them. For the most part, however, the tutor abandoned himself in silence to the peculiar charm of those white and quiet relics of antiquity. He took his finger out of the Baedeker, and made no attempt to study dates or styles or theories; his mind wandered in a dream to all the old, forgotten life which these things represented; and sometimes, in that shifting mist of fancy, there would float out sharply the clear outline of a white arm, or a sloping shoulder, or a bent leg strained in the swift ardor of pursuit, or an earnest face gazing out forever and forever in immortal calm.

At length he found himself, almost without

knowing how, standing before the Doryphorus in the Braccio Nuovo. For some time he paused there, in dreamy contemplation of the exquisite pose and poise, which Polycletus, or some one else, has left for the eternal adoration of mankind. "What a people they were," he thought, "who dreamed the short life-dream under those blue skies of Attica! How wise they were in accepting what they found and looking no further. They bothered themselves with no troublesome questions about death and the hereafter. They saw beauty in the world, beauty, which the moderns have clean forgotten."

Meantime, Edgar was watching his English girls and another party who looked more New Yorkish. "I say, Gordy," he cried, harshly interrupting his companion's reverie, "Does n't that girl look like the photograph — what's her name — Stanton, you know?"

Gordon gave a sharp glance. "Hardly," he answered. "Miss Stanton is, at any rate, a lady, and that young person — well, her father must have struck oil, I should think. By the way, Edgar, that reminds me. I had a letter from Mr. Stanton this morning."

"Did? Well, what does the old boy say?"

"They are coming to Rome to-morrow. Hotel Bristol."

"Let them come when they like — and go."

"I suppose you intend to be civil to them, as your father wishes it."

"Oh, civil, yes. Why not? I'll go round there some day — when I get ready."

"The very least we can do is to go to-morrow afternoon and leave our cards. I dare say they won't see us."

"You can go and leave my pasteboard, if you like. That's what you're for."

"A sort of *valet de place*, I suppose?"

"I should get a great deal more out of any kind of a valet; but call it that, if you like."

"Seriously, Edgar, you don't mean to tell me you won't go round there with me to-morrow afternoon?"

"Seriously, I do mean to tell you just that. Can't you understand English? I have another engagement to-morrow afternoon."

"None more important than this, I should judge."

"I'll do the judging for myself."

"Would you mind telling me what this prior engagement is?"

"It's none of your business; but, as it may annoy you a little, I will. I am going to ride in the Campagna with the Countess Markovski."

"With the Countess Markovski — ride — on horseback, I suppose, in the Campagna?" said Gordon gravely.

"Just so. Don't like it, hey? Kind of cuts you out a bit, don't it, old boy? Want all the countesses and all the women yourself? Can't have 'em,

you see. I have n't got your figure; but I have my way with 'em all the same."

Gordon did n't speak for a moment. He was very thoughtful, as they walked slowly along the chill and empty gallery. "You understand, of course, your father's wishes in regard to Mr. Stanton?" he asked, at length.

"I don't know anything about Mr. Stanton. Of course, I know father wants me to marry the girl."

"Well?"

"Well — I shall do as I like about it."

"As she likes — perhaps?"

"As she likes? Why, you don't think she'd refuse me, do you?"

"I don't know her yet."

"Nor I. I don't need to. I'm not banking on my personal charms, of course. I know what you think of them. But where's the girl that would refuse the son of fifty millions? Did you ever see her?"

"Perhaps not."

"I guess, perhaps not. But the thing is, do I want to marry her? Of course, she's got the rocks; not like me, but well enough for a beginning. Then they do say she's pretty. Only I'm afraid she is n't my style. That's what I've got to find out. Anyway, I'm not going to make her think I'm too anxious, you know. Not much."

They walked on again in silence. Gordon most

devoutly hoped the young lady would prove to be of the required style; but that seemed altogether too good to be true. If not, what?

As they were passing out of the Chiaramonti, they met Morris, who stopped and seemed disposed to chat a little.

"I'll have to get you to excuse me," said Payne. "I want to see a man on the way home. No, you need n't come along, Gordy. I've had about enough of you for one day."

"Great Scott! How do you stand that chap?" asked Morris, when Edgar was out of hearing.

"I wonder at it sometimes myself."

"I should have murdered him long ago — thrashed him within an inch of his life, at any rate. I never imagined such an oaf. But you're too amiable to live."

"Thanks. The truth is, I feel that if I took him right I might make something of him. I keep trying."

"You do, that's a fact. If you took him by the scruff of his neck and dropped him into the Tiber, you might make fish-bait of him, — if they would bite it. What do you expect to make of him?"

"I give it up. To-morrow his intended is coming. I shall turn him over to her."

"Whew!" whistled Morris. "Oh, won't that be fun. May I be there to see! Will he go, like a lamb to the slaughter?"

"Well, not to-morrow. You see, he has pro-

mised to ride with the Countess to-morrow in the Campagna."

"To ride with the Countess Markovski?" Then Morris took his friend by the arm, leaned over close to his ear, and whispered, with awful solemnity, "What if he should marry the Countess Markovski?"

Gordon positively staggered back and gazed at Morris with an expression of horror. "Marry the" — he gasped. "Marry" —

"That's what I said. Oh, what a perfect picnic. It's worth coming to Rome for."

"Heavens and earth!" ejaculated the tutor.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE PINCIAN

It was not Gordon's habit to lie awake nights, nor did he actually lose any sleep over the unfortunate suggestion which Morris had made to him. Nevertheless, his soul was a good deal disquieted, and he devoted such minutes as were casually snatched from slumber to reflection on the possibilities and desirabilities of the future.

When morning came, he left Edgar to mumble over the newspapers, and started out by himself to enjoy a cigar in leisurely contemplation. He wandered through the dull, tame streets of the modern portion of the city toward the Piazza di Spagna, finding it easier to smoke and observe than to do any systematic thinking. What an awful bore the whole situation was. He certainly wished to do the very best he could for his pupil, from a general sense of duty, and still more, from a very lively recollection of all the kindness he had received at the hands of Mr. Payne senior. Without making any elaborate plans, he had imagined, when he left home, that his course would be simple and easy. Edgar was green, to be sure, but he was young; and as practically all that was ex-

pected was that he should learn to enjoy life like a gentleman, there did not seem to be anything very difficult in the matter. Gordon himself had never required teaching for such an object. Accordingly, he had tried from the very beginning to preach by example, now and then offering a bit of good-natured advice or a pleasant suggestion, not in the least dictatorially, but as one companion will always do to another. He had failed at the outset, and soon came to see that he was failing. Gentlemanliness, as he understood it, was neither practiced nor appreciated by Edgar Payne; and the latter's idea of amusing himself seemed to fall off further and further from any gentlemanly standard. It goes without saying that Gordon meant by amusement, not only, nor in any way chiefly, the more trivial gayeties of life, but those higher and subtler spiritual pleasures of art and thought and refined social intercourse, which many people stiffen into rather laborious duties, but which he had the natural grace to enjoy instinctively, and therefore beyond anything else. It would, perhaps, have been too much to expect that Edgar should show any taste for this sort of thing; although Gordon had honestly and earnestly done his best to help him. But even in eating and drinking and all forms of youthful frolic there was a hopeless boorishness, a coarseness, a crude selfishness about the boy, which discouraged and disgusted his tutor almost beyond endurance. Yet,

in spite of a gradually increasing estrangement, leading frequently to open insolence on Edgar's part, Gordon had persisted in trying to exercise a sort of restraining and civilizing influence, had hoped that they might get through their various experiences without any serious break, and that, after their return home, some little good might prove to have been accomplished, even if far less than Mr. Payne had desired. But now?

Turning all this over in his mind, he had wandered past the Trinità de' Monti, and so, slowly, on into the Pincian Gardens. The morning was somewhat dull and misty; but now and then the sun broke through, flooding the roofs below him with a watery light. He leaned against the southern parapet of the promenade, and continued to ruminate.

If Edgar should take it into his head to marry the Countess, or rather, if the Countess should take it into her head to marry Edgar, what could he do? Nothing, probably. He had already considered the possibility of warning Edgar; but what would that amount to? He was well aware that Edgar had not the slightest confidence in any one's veracity. The minute he suspected a design to influence or control him, he would be roused to opposition, and it was extremely likely that a result exactly contrary to the desirable one would be brought about.

Then what would be the character of any warn-

ing that was to be given? Should Gordon confine himself to repeating the general stories of the lady's past, as if they had come to him in the form of mere vulgar rumor, suggesting doubts about the existence of the late Count Markovski, narrating the unfortunate experiences of Brown, Jones, and Robinson? It might be done, but it would be lamentably vague, and probably quite ineffective. Must he, after all, admit that he himself had known Antonia, had loved her, had been fooled by her? Must he bring his own intimate testimony to her witchery, her treachery, her heartlessness, to confirm the darker and more damning evidence of others? No, the idea was too disgusting. He would keep himself, his own feelings and sufferings out of the fight, at any rate, for the present. As the word fight occurred to him, he smiled at the thought of trying to do battle with the Countess Markovski; and it was clear to him, beforehand, where the victory would fall, if she should really wish to enter the lists.

Still, need he do anything just at present? There was Miss Stanton coming. She might possibly affect the result in some way. It was, indeed, too much to hope that she would take to Edgar, or Edgar to her. Yet who could tell? She was rich, and to Edgar that meant so much. Even if Miss Stanton were indifferent to him, any interest that he might take in her would be the surest safeguard against the dark lady who was enchanting him at

present. Yes, the proper thing was to wait, especially since, if the situation was getting too complex it was always possible to cable and summon Mr. Payne to the rescue.

With this conclusion, the tutor dismissed the matter from his mind, and, leaning over the parapet, gazed idly at the well-known scene before him. The weather was brightening more and more, and gleams of sunshine were falling constantly on one point or another of the landscape. Now they lay flat on the low dark cover of the Pantheon. Now they brought out sharply the yellow towers of the Capitol. Now they bathed, in full splendor, the immense, all-absorbing dome of St. Peter's and the heavy masses of the Vatican beside it, then swept beyond these to the long ridge which terminates in San Pietro in Montorio, and finally rushed away, over hill and valley and river and plain, to the dark rolling slopes of the Alban Mountains. All the while, Gordon saw and heard below him the tumultuous life of the city, pouring out from the Corso into the vast Piazza del Popolo, and from there surging back again into the narrow and crowded streets.

The sight was an old, old one to Gordon, as to so many others; yet old as it was, the grandeur and impressiveness of it touched and stirred his soul, as it had done when he first beheld it, nay, far more than when he first beheld it; for Rome has, more than any other city, the power

of growing and growing in its hold on one. At first sight, especially since the building of the ugly modern portions, it appears tame, ordinary, and commonplace. It has not the seductive luxury of Naples, nor the noble majesty of Genoa, nor the romantic poetry of Venice, nor the perfect grace of Florence. Beginning with a general view of it, you are disappointed. Then the charm grows. By degrees the vast stream of historical association penetrates your life, making you one with it; and the ancient city twines itself about your heart-strings, drawing you back again, even when you are thousands of miles away.

Roma! Roma! Roma! There is a slow and thunderous resonance about the very name, which sounds like huge tides of memory, echoing forever through the dim foundations of the world. Roma! Roma! Roma! It may be an idle fancy; but is there not something characteristic in the names of many of the great capitals? Listen to New York (N'Yark), with its hint of smart, jaunty, shoddy, new-made riches. Then there is London — good, solid, beefy, full of square British manliness and prejudice. And Paris, swift, keen, and witty. And Madrid, grave and haughty. And Wien, light and flute-like, piping and gossiping over the Praten. But Roma — how solemn it is, and deep-toned, and melancholy, heavy-fraught with the majesty of ages!

Roma! Roma! Roma! How it throbs with the

triumphant outcry of the legions and the groans of the martyrs and the swell of Christian organs and the boom of cannon upon cannon ! Roma ! Roma ! Roma ! There is no word more grand and lofty in all the varied language of the world.

After something of this fashion dreamed Gordon, gazing over the parapet of the Pincian, and content, as he always was, to let anything external distract his mind from tedious thoughts within. He was left to his musings with little interruption ; since, at that hour in the morning, the Pincian is as remarkable for solitude as it is in the afternoon for crowds and gayety. But, at length, looking at the winding path that leads up from the Piazza del Popolo, he saw approaching a group of persons, which attracted his attention very decidedly. It consisted of a gentleman and lady, and a girl of perhaps twenty or so. A brief glance sufficed to make Gordon almost certain that the young lady was Miss Priscilla Stanton ; and it was therefore highly probable that the elders of the party were Miss Priscilla Stanton's papa and mamma.

The slow process of the ascent gave Gordon time to examine the newcomers at his leisure. Mr. Stanton was a stout man of middle height, perhaps fifty-five years of age, with a full, dark mustache inclining to gray. The increasing amplitude of his waist made his movements and his whole appearance something heavy and sluggish ; but his expression, so far as Gordon could judge at that distance,

was alert and intelligent, and, at the same time, open and kindly. Mrs. Stanton was of much the same build and figure as her husband, though of a very light and fair complexion ; and Gordon gathered from her looks that she had a good share of that salt of jollity which alone can save stout old ladies from being bores.

But Priscilla naturally attracted most of our tutor's attention. She was a beauty. It grieves me to say so ; because beautiful heroines are getting terribly commonplace, and we ought to depict them as small, dark, and insignificant, but full of soul and higher education. But Priscilla was beautiful. Nothing of the classical, heroic, swanlike style, to be sure, no heroine of high tragedy : it was very clear that, when she was forty, she would be stout and a trifle waddly, like her mother. But, meantime, she was round and soft and graceful and delicate and infinitely merry in a quiet way. Passive merriment was written all over her. The grace she had came from perfect ease. All her movements seemed to be simple and spontaneous. There was no haste about her, no waste ; yet the quiet was absolutely natural, no hint of consciousness in it. Then, in spite of the ease and softness, there was no appearance of weakness. The step and carriage were firm and erect, with the suggestion of plenty of force, whenever it might be needed. As for her countenance, the nose and chin were a little short, the forehead a little low perhaps ; but the face was

very merry, like the rest of her, and the deep blue eyes looked always ready to fill with laughter and pass it quickly to the two deep dimples in the cheeks. She wore a trim blue gown, simple, with shortish skirt, a blue hat with a white wing at the side, and a black boa, which set off delightfully the wavy richness of her blond hair. As Gordon surveyed her, he thought he had seen nothing more charming for a long, long time.

They soon passed out of his sight, following the long angle of the driveway which leads to the top of the hill ; but he continued in the same position, waiting till they should approach him from behind. Then, when he heard the voices quite near by, he turned, walked up to them, and raising his hat, said, with quiet courtesy : " Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Stanton ? "

The three paused a moment, Mrs. Stanton and Priscilla looking at papa, and papa a little puzzled. Then a pleasant light came into his brown eyes, which were very handsome, soft brown eyes still. " Ah," he said, " I think this must be the son of my old friend Payne."

Gordon was not a conceited fellow, but the expression of evidently agreeable surprise which communicated itself from Mr. Stanton's face to that of his wife, and still more charmingly to his daughter's, was a little flattering. It was somewhat disturbing also, however ; and the tutor answered, as hastily as possible, " No, I cannot claim that honor,

though I should be proud of it. I am only Edgar's tutor. My name is Gordon."

Mrs. Stanton's smile chilled ten degrees from the enthusiastic to the civil; but Gordon could not perceive an equal refrigeration in Priscilla's. As for Mr. Stanton, he looked a little vague for a second, and then spoke kindly: "Yes, yes. It is you with whom I have corresponded. Mr. Payne has spoken of you, Mr. Gordon, in a very complimentary fashion. Indeed, he must think highly of you to have intrusted you with his only son. Let me have the pleasure of presenting you to my wife and daughter."

The usual courtesies followed. "We only arrived last evening, Mr. Gordon," said Mrs. Stanton. "We are at the Hotel Bristol, where I hope you will find us often. They told us there that the Pincian was a good place to see the city from, and, as it was so near, we thought we would stroll up here for an hour. We were too tired to start on any long excursion."

"Yes," chimed in Priscilla, "tired to death. And now Mr. Gordon has turned up so conveniently, to tell us all about it. Let us sit down on this seat here and be told the whole story."

"Yet you were the girl who would n't have a guide and wanted to find out everything yourself," replied her mother, laughing — and sitting down.

"A guide! mamma dear! A guide!"

"But first," asked Mr. Stanton, "how did you recognize us so quickly?"

Gordon sat down where Priscilla made room for him, between herself and her father. "I got your letter yesterday," he answered, "so that I knew when to look for you. Then Mr. Payne had described you to me frequently. Besides, I have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Stanton's photograph."

There was a second's pause, which Gordon felt to be a little awkward. Had this choice young lamb been warned of the prospective slaughter? And what did she think of it? But almost immediately Mr. Stanton spoke again: "Tell me something about Edgar. You may know that his father was the nearest friend I ever had; but I have never seen the son, except once or twice, when he was a small boy. As long as they were in Chicago, he lived mainly out on his father's farm in the country. When he was fifteen years old Mr. Payne moved East. I consider the father a very remarkable man."

"He is a remarkable man," Gordon answered, only too glad to expatiate on that topic. "The most remarkable man I ever met. I cannot say how good he has been to me."

"And Edgar? He resembles his father?"

"In some respects he does. Edgar is still young, you know."

"Not so very. Nearly twenty-two, I think. You

mean he seems young?" added Mr. Stanton curiously.

"Well, yes, in some ways; in others he is remarkably mature. The truth is, he has seen very little of the world. His surroundings have been peculiar, in some respects unfortunately so. His father is wholly absorbed in business, and Edgar has been left very much to himself. Mr. Payne hoped that coming abroad and meeting many people of all sorts would — perhaps add a little polish" —

"And has it done so? You have been abroad now for some months, I believe."

"Since June — yes." Gordon was just about driven to the wall. "Mr. Stanton," he said, "I want you to see Edgar yourself and form your own opinion of him. I am responsible for him now, you know; and perhaps that makes me more alive to some of his weak points than a stranger would be. I hope you will see a great deal of him this winter. I am sure your influence and Mrs. Stanton's will help him immensely, far more than being so much alone with me."

There was another silence. Gordon felt it to be a disagreeable quarter of an hour. It was evident that Mr. Stanton was very much interested in Edgar and might be as inclined as his friend to bring about a match between the two children. Yet the tutor could not think of one single thing he could honestly say in his pupil's favor. Was it not better to keep still than to puff with false

praises, which would only make the reality more disappointing and make him seem like a fool himself?

Fortunately Mrs. Stanton came to his assistance. "I think Mr. Gordon is right," she said amiably. "We shall get at Edgar much better if we take him at first hand, without any explanations."

"Perhaps that is so," Mr. Stanton agreed, with a little hesitation. "Just tell me one thing. He is not dissipated, not inclined to be wild in any way?"

"No," answered Gordon eagerly; "he certainly is not. I never knew a fellow more completely master of himself in everything."

The tone of this drew out a quick, keen glance from the older gentleman. But Priscilla, who had taken no part and apparently no interest in the talk hitherto, broke in at this point. "Come," she said, "I am dying to get some information. Now, Mr. Gordon, tell me the name and history of everything I see."

"Certainly," was the delighted reply. "But you have n't been in Rome before, then?"

"Never. That is, I have n't. Papa was here for a week fifteen years ago; but as he went everywhere else on the same trip, and all in three months, his reminiscences are not very reliable. We have been abroad since a year ago last June; but we have been in the north of Europe all the time until now; so Italy is new to me and I want to see everything."

"But are n't you tired to death of seeing everything, long before this? Most people are."

"I should say so," murmured Mr. Stanton; but Priscilla answered, "No, no. I am quite indefatigable. I have learned to take it easily. I see just what I want to see, only a little at a time. But it does trouble my conscience to bore poor papa so. He likes Wall Street much better than the Grand Canal. And he never can see the difference between Turner and Tintoretto. And he will not bow down, even before two stars in Baedeker. But come, Mr. Gordon, I know you are a perfect cicerone. Please explain this panorama, and don't omit the double stars."

Gordon was more than content to undertake the task. He thought there was nothing more delightful than to study a beautiful prospect with a beautiful girl. Besides, anything was better than further discussion of Edgar. So he abandoned himself to more or less lucid explanation, while Mr. Stanton enjoyed a cigar, Mrs. Stanton made an occasional comment, and Priscilla, all sympathetic attention, looked, and learned, and inwardly digested.

"You must have made a very careful study of Rome," she said at length.

"No, I never made a careful study of anything; but I lived here for two winters and mostly with people who did make a careful study. So I picked up a few points."

In a little while they had exhausted the prospect from the seat where they were. So Gordon suggested that they should make the tour of the Gardens. At first, they walked four abreast; but, as they turned into the narrower alleys, Gordon and Priscilla naturally led the way, Mr. and Mrs. Stanton following, though closely enough to take part in the talk and explanations.

For nearly an hour they wandered back and forth, chatting of Rome, and, apropos of Rome, of everything else, as it is so easy to do. When they walked slowly homeward, along the Via Sistina, to the Hotel Bristol, the two young people felt as if they had known one another all their lives. It was always so with Gordon. In one morning you got more intimate with him than you could in a month with most people. To be sure, that first intimacy was all. You could get no nearer to him, if you knew him forever.

When they reached the door of the hotel, the young man of course declined an invitation to enter.

"But you will bring Edgar to us at once, — this afternoon, — won't you?" said Mr. Stanton.

"This afternoon — he has an engagement for this afternoon, I believe. Won't you be tired? Wouldn't to-morrow be better?" Then seeing that the delay was decidedly not approved of, he added hastily, "or this evening. Would you all be visible this evening?"

The evening proved to be acceptable, and Gordon went his way in a rather curious state of mind. In the first place, it was at least an even chance whether Edgar would be willing to dispose of his evening in that fashion. If he should decline—what? But reflection on that subject soon gave place to the general thought of Priscilla. Would she, could she become Mrs. Edgar Payne? Gordon decided at once, with some annoyance, and also with a certain secret satisfaction, that that solution of his difficulties might as well be abandoned. He would continue honestly to do his best to bring about the match. That, of course. But he felt it to be quite impossible that either love or money could ever make his dear young friend acceptable to such a pair of blue eyes as that.

CHAPTER VIII

"AS I RIDE, AS I RIDE"

A GROOM in the usual black livery, mounted on a stout black cob, stood like a statue before the Countess Markovski's door, while another groom held the Countess's horse in readiness. This was a small, thoroughbred, black mare, slight and delicate, but finely formed, and with every sign of nerve and speed in the thin, shapely limbs, and eager neck. Her mistress's whim was to leave mane and tail untrimmed; and the latter swept the ground. In a few minutes Payne came pounding up the street, on a heavy red roan hack, who was clumsy enough, but looked as if he might manage to go, in some fashion. His rider was as awkward on horseback as any one could possibly be; yet, like his steed, he gave the impression of being able to get there.

The servants, who had probably received their cue, informed the visitor most respectfully that her ladyship would be ready in a moment. Would he go in? No, he would wait there. So he sat, stiff and frowning, on his arm-gaunt steed, whose manner of standing contrasted sharply enough with the mare's controlled intensity and the perfect form of the groom's animal.

It was more than a moment; but at length the lady appeared. Edgar put his hand clumsily to his hat, but never offered to dismount, leaving the care of seating her to the footman. Doubtless, Antonia thought to herself that before long she would have taught him better manners. He atoned for his rudeness, in his way, however, by staring at her with all his eyes, until she gave the signal to depart. She was worth staring at. To be sure, with the exception of a wet bathing suit, there is no garment more trying to a woman than a riding habit; but the Countess Markovski could wear one, if any one could. The delicate grace of her figure, that peculiar, serpentine, Lamia-like quality, which we have already noted, was wonderfully adapted to the simple, clean cut of the close-fitting gown; while the firm twist of her hair was cunningly placed so as to give fullest effect to the poise of her beautiful head. "Come," she said, lifting her hand slightly and managing her horse with the ease of an absolute Amazon. The animal seemed to respond to every motion and to prick up her ears for every whisper. "Come."

They set off sedately, with the groom behind, passing first through the heart of the city towards the Forum of Trajan and the Palatine. "I want to get out on the Appia," she cried. "I have n't been there this year. Does it make any difference to you?"

"Not a bit. One part of their old city is all the

same as another to me. But, say, are you going to have that chap after us all the way?"

"Not if you mind. We will leave him at the gate and tell him to meet us at the Porta San Paolo. We must respect the proprieties, you know."

"I thought you were above that sort of thing. Propriety is for poor creatures like Gordon."

"You think property is above propriety? Well, there is something in that."

They rode for a while without speaking. The crowded and noisy streets were not favorable to conversation. At last, as they reached the Via San Teodoro, they were left more to themselves. Edgar was riding half a length behind the Countess, watching her and her horse.

"That's a pretty bit of flesh you've got there. Must have cost you a thousand dollars at least, I should say."

"She is pretty. I love her. Her name is Satanita. What she cost? I don't know. She was the gift of a very dear friend."

The naïve meekness with which this was said would have delighted any connoisseur; but it annoyed Edgar. "Is that so?" he muttered, with a grunt; and rode in silence till they reached the Porta San Sebastiano. There the Countess dismissed the groom, giving him directions as she had suggested. Then the two, passing through the gate, rode out side by side, along the old highway.

"Now," began the lady mischievously, "I'll tell you all about the ancient Romans. They were buried out here."

"It's the best thing that I ever heard of them," was the gruff reply. "You were going to tell me about yourself, you know."

"Oh, I am more ancient than the Romans — and not half so interesting. Wait till I am buried too. You may hear some good of me then."

When they had gone a little further, she went on: "There is the 'Domine Quo Vadis' Church. Don't you want to see the footprint of Christ in marble?"

"I say, Mark Twain tells about that. Of course you've read 'Innocents Abroad'?" His companion shook her head. "Not read 'Innocents Abroad'? What have you read? But I suppose you are n't much of a reader, any more than I am. Not like that infernal Gordon, who always has his nose in a book. Mark's always making fun of saints and relics and old masters and all that stuff. Say, you're a Catholic, I suppose?"

"I suppose I am. And you're a Protestant, not used to Catholics, probably."

"Oh, yes, we have 'em at home. Irish, you know, navvies and such like. Well, now, how much of that stuff do you believe?"

"What stuff?"

"Why, footprints in marble, and pieces of the true cross, and nails, and all the rest of it."

"I have seen, even in my short life, things a good deal more miraculous than that."

"Then you do believe in them?"

"I believe just what my confessor tells me to believe. That's the easiest way."

"I say, do you honestly confess your sins?"

"Do you think I have so very many?"

"My, but I should like to be that confessor!"

When they had gone a little further, the neighborhood inclined her roguishly to renew the subject.

"You have seen the Catacombs?" she asked.

"Catacombs? No, what are they?"

"Why, the tombs of the early Christians, places where they fled from persecution, miles and miles of long passages underground, often two and three stories deep, with little chapels and meeting places, where the blessed martyrs used to live for months sometimes."

"Ugh!" grunted Edgar. "I should prefer to live in the Auditorium."

"Oh, but you have n't any historical curiosity at all. Don't you feel the interest of mystery in all these things? Don't you feel any sympathy with those old people, who gave their lives for their faith?"

"Not a bit. What did they make by it? A parcel of precious fools, I should call 'em. Catch me getting martyred for anything!"

The Countess laughed a little silvery laugh.

"Look here," went on Edgar. "You're work-

ing a big bluff on me. Did n't you say the other day that you hated all the dead people and old Romans and the rest of it, that you were sick of relics and ruins, and wanted to get into the new world? What do you mean by coming at me now with this talk about tombs and early Christians and such nonsense?"

"Let me look at you," she said soberly. "Are you always the same? What a grand, noble personage you must be. I float about all day, like a bit of thistle-down in the wind. One minute I feel strong and rash and ready to defy gods and men; the next, I cower and cringe before every blast of Heaven, and tell my beads and shiver at the thought of dim ghosts in windy corners. If I were to be in your vast America now, with your immense prairies stretching out forever like your future, I should long to be back here among the mouldering dead."

"You're a queer one," remarked her companion, giving her an almost superstitious glance. "But I suppose you're a woman."

"Yes," answered the Countess, with a meditative air, "I suppose I am." She shook Satanita into a quick trot, rather ill adapted to conversation.

By the time they approached the tomb of Cæcilia Metella, she slackened her pace and allowed Edgar to get breath enough to talk. "Gas-house?" he said, pointing to the imposing structure.

"No, no, barbarian. Did you never hear of

Cæcilia Metella?” He shook his head. “Nor did anybody else either. But that is her tomb nevertheless. Suppose I were to have a tomb like that. ‘To the memory of Antonia, wife of’ — whom shall I say? Well, never mind. And they would make a legend about me. They would say, for instance, that I was a pious matron, with very gray hair and chilly frigidity, who perpetually visited the poor. Or, perhaps, that I was a virtuous, neglected spouse, one of the blue-eyed, pale, blond kind, you know, who fold their hands and wonder how their husbands can desert such models of lamblike innocence; and that, after persecuting me into the grave, my cruel tyrant was overcome with remorse and built a splendid mausoleum over my remains. Or they will say — they will say — anything but the truth; for, although people declare that truth will always come out, it is the only thing that never does in this lying world.”

“Well, then,” suggested Edgar in an insinuating tone, “why not tell me the truth, so that I can make it all straight?”

“No, thanks. I am interested in my epitaph at present, not my autobiography. They differ like the antipodes.” Again she touched up her horse and gave her companion enough to do to keep the stout, red roan pounding beside her.

They were getting out into the open now, the vast ruins of the aqueducts on one side, and the mountains hanging cloudlike on the horizon; but

still, near at hand, they passed tomb after tomb, some with four walls almost complete, though shorn of all their ornaments and splendor, others mere remnants, hardly one stone left upon another.

"Graves! Graves! Graves!" said the Countess, waving her hand toward them as she passed.

"Confound it!" was the rough reply. "Why do you want to ride in this country? I believe I hear spooks."

"Oh, no! They are all dead, dead enough. Dead as one of Mrs. Barton's receptions. The last scrap of their old Roman dust has blown away long ago, long ago. But come, now we have got beyond the worst of it."

She drew in her horse and walked slowly beside her companion. They had passed Casale Rotondo and got out into the free, open Campagna, that strange country which hardly has its parallel anywhere. The general elements of the picture, although sombre and melancholy, may, of course, be matched in other places: the low, rolling, naked hillocks, dotted only rarely with a deformed and stunted tree, the solitary shepherd, clad in skins, with staff and pointed hat, gaunt, shaggy, and forlorn. But the combination of these more natural objects with some ever-present reminder of decay—a bit of wall, a broken arch, a ruined tower, rendered more mute and dreary by ivy and sunshine—makes the most peculiarly solemn, dread, and desolate landscape in the world.

"There!" continued Antonia, stopping short on a little elevation and gazing far away into the glimmering dimness of the sunlit distance. "There! This is better. I like this. This is free."

"Free!" was the discontented echo. "And all that army of spooks behind us! I don't know what you call free; but give me the plains of Illinois, with miles and miles of corn waving in the sunshine, just thousands of dollars growing right up out of the ground; and don't talk to me about this dirty, monotonous, barren, malarial desert."

"Plains of Illinois?" was the thoughtful inquiry. "No ruins, no past, no dead, no history? I wonder if I should like it over there. Everything is alive, I suppose?"

"I guess everything's alive. Why, you go out west, a little further west, and you'll see a city spring up in a day or two. Alive! Why, over here they haven't a notion of what living is. Hustle! Well, I should say we hustle. You ought to see my father. He's got more schemes in his head — more railroads, and factories, and deals on the market, and such — than this old Pope of Rome ever had in all his life."

"I should like to see your father."

"I guess you would. He's just like me."

They followed the Via Appia for a few moments longer, and as they went on the country became more and more desolate and unfrequented. Then, in a little while, they came to an insignificant by-

road, which turned sharp off to the west, leading them over a fairly even country, toward the setting sun.

"Now," cried the Countess suddenly, "for a gallop. How much can you get out of that red beast of yours?"

"Not much," said Edgar in disgust. "I say, what do you want to run for?"

"Because I like it," was the short reply. "I'll give you a lead. Catch me if you can." So saying, she settled herself in the saddle, lifted her hand a little, and spoke a word to Satanita. The creature gathered her legs under her and was off like a frightened rabbit, while her mistress turned to Edgar, with a burst of wayward laughter. As for him, he muttered a curse under his breath, and lashed the roan into such a gallop as the animal could manage; but it was vain to think of keeping up with his companion. Groaning and grumbling, he plunged and sweated along, as best he could, keeping her more or less clearly in view; while she rushed on in her mad flight, recklessly regardless of occasional obstacles, now and then turning in the saddle to wave her hand to him, with what he felt to be a gesture of derision.

At length, he was gratified to see her draw rein under a little clump of trees, far, far ahead of him; and, proceeding more leisurely, he finally overtook her. She had dismounted and tied her horse; and was sitting by the roadside, her knees

drawn up, her hands clasped about them. The rapid motion had somewhat disordered her hair, and had heightened her color and the brightness of her eyes. As he came panting up, she smiled mischievously.

“Say, what in thunder did you do that for?” he cried, in his coarsest tone, leaping off and sitting down beside her, as close as he dared.

“I don’t know. I seldom know why I do anything.”

There was silence for a moment, he sulking, and she apparently absorbed in the contemplation of the landscape. “So you ’re going to be married,” she began suddenly, without looking at him, as indifferently as if she had remarked on the weather.

Edgar started. “I married? Oh, you mean that Stanton girl.”

“Did n’t you tell me so yourself?”

“Not a bit of it. I said my father wanted me to marry her.”

“Your father is a man who always has his way, is n’t he?”

“By Jove, he can’t make me marry, if I don’t want to. Say, what’s the use of marrying, anyway?”

“What indeed?” The Countess sat up straight and her eyes flamed with real — or artificial — passion. “Marriage! Ah, the most ingenious and the most despicable of all the devices men have imagined for the enslaving of women! You did n’t

know that I was a misanthrope, a real, real man-hater, did you? You did n't know that I have an utter and ineradicable contempt for every member of your miserable sex, that my one wish and desire is to be revenged on them, that, that — in short, you are very young and there are so many things you don't know that a midsummer day would n't suffice even to hint at them. Poor child!" She looked at him with an expression of ineffable pity.

Edgar sat open-mouthed in amazement at this outburst. Yet the scorn of it was so beautiful that it only enthralled him all the more. "I say," he stammered, "don't talk like that. You scare a feller. What's the matter with men? They're all right, if you take 'em right. Only you don't want the palavery ones like Gordon, such as you're used to. You want somebody plain and frank and honest like me."

She shook her head; but he saw, or thought he saw, just a gleam of tenderness pass through her eyes. "Are you plain and frank and honest?" she said.

"That's my figure, though I'm not handsome. You ought to come to America, and get out of this rotten old world."

"Don't they lie in America, and call self-interest ideal devotion, and beasts, men? Ah, how easily we are led to think that Heaven is everywhere where we are not!" She bowed her head, and sobbed, and the tears flowed; and she suffered

Edgar to take her hand for just an instant. Then she sprang up quickly. "*Allons!*" she cried. "Never let us sit down and think, never, never! If we could gallop on and on and on to the end of time!"

So they remounted and rode away, but at a less furious pace. Antonia talked little, however. What she did say was very confiding and gentle. Now and then she looked at her companion with a melting tenderness which he had not seen in her face before, and which he found simply distracting. The by-road soon brought them out into the Via Laurentina, and following this, they came nearer and nearer to the city. When they reached San Paolo, the sun was almost down and the cold autumnal shadows were gathering about the lonely edifice.

"I want to go in and say my prayers," said the Countess softly. "I love the vast solitude of this church. Will you come?"

"Oh, certainly," answered Edgar. "Though as to prayers" — The Countess pressed her finger to her lip.

They dismounted and gave their horses in charge to a man at the door. The hour for closing was near at hand; but the attendant seemed to know the Countess and bowed as she passed.

"Give the man a franc or two," she whispered to Edgar, who obeyed, with a sour grimace.

Inside, they found themselves alone. The huge

and somewhat heavy body of the building was rendered even more sepulchral than usual by the dim light of the late autumn afternoon, which fell with uncertain radiance on the solid and vulgar splendors of porphyry, alabaster, and malachite. The Countess, bowed into an attitude of the deepest devotion, walked swiftly past the high altar to one of the small transept chapels on the further side. Then she knelt, and seemed to be absorbed in the most passionate prayer. Edgar followed and looked on in amazement. The wilds of America had never presented him with a specimen like this.

For full fifteen minutes the Countess remained absolutely still and rapt in her devotions, leaving her humble adorer to bite his fingers and gaze at the bowed, slight, shapely black figure, first in astonishment, then in curious interrogation, finally in disgusted impatience. At length, she rose without a word, walked back as swiftly and quietly as she had come; and in a moment, they were on horseback again, making their way homeward. Antonia's mood had changed entirely, however. "Ah!" she said, "I have given to Heaven that which was Heaven's. Now for the world again." And she talked and she talked, flooding the bewildered Edgar with a stream of Roman gossip, bitter, vivid, fascinating; quick *bons mots*, delicate and insinuating anecdote, malicious portraits, sparkling with truth and satire. Through all this she contrived to mingle a thread of skillful, bewil-

dering, intoxicating flattery, with here and there a hint of wayward tenderness, far more than enough to turn the head of a more sophisticated youth than he with whom she had to deal. Perhaps she was quite aware of this and talked as much for her own pleasure as for his. At any rate, the subjugation was complete. When he parted from her at her door, he cried, "Say, I'd rather hear you talk than read the best money article that ever was written."

CHAPTER IX

HIS FATHER'S SON

THE Stantons were sitting in their parlor at the Hotel Bristol, after the lengthy and solemn *table d'hôte* dinner was finished. Although they had been in Rome but twenty-four hours, the room was as comfortable and homelike as if they had lived in it always. The courier, who had reached the city before them, had selected a delightful apartment, which looked almost directly toward the south. He had hired a piano and arranged the larger articles of furniture; and, after Mrs. Stanton arrived, a few directions from her, and a few hours' manipulation by her maid, had done the rest. A bright wood fire snapped and sparkled in the grate, books and bric-à-brac were scattered about the tables, pillows and rugs adapted the bare hotel chairs and sofas to the human anatomy, photographs of home friends and places caught the eye from walls and tables. Life under such conditions is a very different thing from the dreary sojourn in dirty pensions, at eight francs a day.

The company seated in this attractive apartment consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Stanton and Priscilla, Mr. Edwin Stanton, and an intimate friend of his,

Mr. Edward Parsons. Priscilla was dressed in a light gray, semi-evening gown, which clearly indicated a recent visit to Paris. It not only fitted perfectly, but was designed in such a fashion as to bring out, to the utmost, the soft roundness of her figure, without intensifying it in too marked a manner. She wore no ornaments, except an antique gold pin at her throat, and one small diamond on her finger.

Uncle Edwin was in a state of unspeakable felicity. Three members of his beloved family had come to relieve his Roman solitude ; and, moreover, the beauty and grace of Priscilla quite surpassed his expectations, and charmed him, like the sight and odor of a rare and lovely flower. His delight manifested itself constantly in quaint and pleasant jests, which made you laugh more in sympathy with him than at the simple humor of the things themselves. He accompanied these with gleeful chuckles and the frequent rubbing of his hands, now and then passing one of them over the lower part of his face and chin.

Mr. Edward Parsons was well known in Rome and almost everywhere else. He was a native of Plymouth, Massachusetts. In his younger days he had been a sea-captain, in command of an Indiaman ; and occasionally he would mix the salt flavor of those old voyages with the very different matter of his ordinary conversation. But he had never loved his trade ; and, when his father died, leaving him a small independence, he betook himself to idling,

wandering, and talking. He was no scholar, hardly even a reader; but he had a most extraordinary love for beauty and appreciation of things spiritual. He felt Nature as poets feel her. He felt art as artists feel it. He was absolutely free from convention in these matters, yielding himself to the direct impression, without care for the theories of professors, or the cant of learned amateurs. Then, he liked to talk — how he did like to talk. Not to converse; for he never listened. But he would pour you forth an endless stream of poetry and rhetoric, abuse and praise, equally extravagant, of everything and everybody, as long as you would listen, and longer. He repeated himself, like all great talkers, and could be rather tedious; yet, even when you thought you had heard him all out a thousand times, you might take a quiet walk with him and he would almost reveal to you a new world. He would take you by the buttonhole in a crowded street, stop you stock-still, put his face almost into yours, and repeat a stanza of Shelley, who was his idol; and although you knew that every one was gazing and laughing at you, his manner was so intense, so earnest, and so absolutely simple, that you felt the beautiful verses as you had never felt them before. He was a man of middle height, thick and solid, somewhat bent and heavy-gaited like a sailor; immense leonine head, with thick gray hair, bushy gray mustache, thick protruding lips, large nose, large ears, large chin.

The friendship between this man and Mr. Edwin Stanton was very intimate and very lovely to see ; lovely, because it was wholly founded on what was best and highest in their natures, their sensibility, their love for the purest and most beautiful things. There was nearly twenty years' difference in their ages ; but this did not seem to affect the relation between them, except that Parsons always treated his elder with a gentle and considerate reverence.

So, as the Stantons sat before their fire in the Hotel Bristol, Mr. Parsons was talking. He had not met any one of them before ; but that made no difference. His conversation never had the slightest reference to the wealth, occupation, or condition of his hearers ; and he would talk just as earnestly to a young girl or a poor artist as to a duke or a millionaire. This was a great part of his charm — to artists and young girls.

Mr. Stanton had just ventured some observation to the effect that he should not be sorry to see America again. "Yes," said Parsons, "it is a great country. We are the first to teach the world that simple living can be respectable. The servility over here is disgusting. Monarchs and aristocrats — pah ! What are they beside a man ?"

"Then the soldiers," Mr. Stanton went on. "We have just come from Germany, and it seems as if every other man there wore a uniform. I hate to think we shall ever come to that at home."

"No, no," was the reassuring answer ; "we

shall never come to that. The world progresses. The great mark of the American people is common sense. Their common sense will never tolerate such an absurdity as a military government. War is outgrown. Wealth is vulgar and war outgrown. You will never see the civilized nations like England and France and the United States at war with each other again."

"But, Mr. Parsons," asked Mr. Stanton mildly, "if you think so much of your own country, why don't you visit it? Why do you spend the greater part of your life over here?"

"Ah, ha!" answered he, with a peculiar, kindly snuffle, most characteristic, "you see, everything is new over there, no associations, no art, no historic charm. For an idler, there is nothing like reminiscences of the past. It will all come in time. In five hundred years the Anglo-Saxon, the Irish, the German, and, for all I know, the Chinese, will be blended into one stock; the American will be born, and we shall have a literature and an art that will be worthy of us. But now life in the United States is painful—painful. You see the average American in the street, and his face is anxious, wire-drawn. He is thin, emaciated, and so full of care, and so vulgar with his money. Then they think they have society in Boston. There is Ce-lia—Ce-lia"—pronouncing with a peculiar drawl the name—not Celia—of a lady whom Boston honored for many years—"Celia, she

thought she was a poet, and had a salon, and was witty ; and all the little Bostonians used to gather round and pay court to her. Oh, it is delicious — delicious. Then they think they have literature — poor William used to think he was a literary man — Oh, that feller, that feller ! — pompous — and pretentious — and ingenious ” —

There is no reason to suppose the stream would ever have ceased to flow, if, at that moment, Gordon and Edgar had not been announced.

Gordon entered first, as easily as usual, although the burden of his situation was heavier on his mind than anything he had ever known before. Edgar followed him loutishly, not with any suggestion of shyness, which is always so easily forgiven, but with that peculiar, boorish, insolent indifference which exasperated every one. The first introductions were got through somehow and Gordon managed to seat himself close to Priscilla, who had drawn away from the others, to escape the heat of the fire. The two met with a frankness and ease which usually belong only to old acquaintance, and which were bred partly of their natural dispositions and partly of the peculiar circumstances in which they were placed.

As for Edgar, it was evident that Mr. Stanton was determined to do everything that could be done to put things on the most friendly basis. He placed the young man in a chair between himself and Mrs. Stanton, and began a series of affection-

ate questions ; while uncle Edwin looked on curiously from the other side of the fire, and Mr. Parsons slouched down in his chair, his hands folded on his stomach and his eyes half closed, in an attitude usual with him when waiting for a chance to seize his conversational prey.

"And what do you hear from your father, my dear boy?" asked Mr. Stanton.

The quiet kindness with which he was received made no more impression on Edgar than cool insolence would have done. It merely appeared clear to him that these people were set on catching him, at any price. So he lounged back indifferently in his chair, crossed his legs, and did everything possible to show that he was not to be caught so easily. "Oh, father's all right, I guess," he answered.

"Does he write to you often?"

"No. I believe he writes to Gordon oftener than he does to me. Notifies me that he has paid my drafts. That's all I want."

"Don't you think he could be persuaded to join us out here?"

Edgar closed one eye, with indescribable jocularity. "Don't speak of it. What would we want the old gentleman out here for?"

"I thought he might enjoy seeing the sights with you and all the rest of us."

"That is n't his style, you know. What would anybody want to be in this old town for, when they

could be doing the trick in the market every day?" Here the youth launched forth on one of his customary tirades against Rome and all things Roman.

It was curious to watch the faces of his auditors. Mr. Stanton wore the look of painful self-restraint with which we regard an obnoxious person who is made sacred to us by associations we are bound to respect. Nay, more, there was real tragedy in his eyes, when one thought of his old friendship and this bitter shattering of his hopes. Mrs. Stanton's amiable countenance came as near to expressing disgust as her natural kindliness would permit. Uncle Edwin showed undisguised distress, not only in his features, but in his whole attitude. Even Mr. Parsons half opened his eyes to inspect this curious animal which wanted to do all the talking. As for Gordon and Priscilla, sitting in the half-shadow behind the rest, they understood each other and the significance of the spectacle. Gordon looked at her and shrugged his shoulders in utter helplessness; and her dimples half formed themselves into a responsive smile.

After a few moments, Mr. Stanton feebly endeavored to effect a diversion. "Probably some of the more modern cities please you better. I daresay you found London attractive."

"London!" was the prompt response. "London! I don't want to hear anything about London. It's worse than Rome. Dirty, foggy, nasty place!"

And then, those English ; snobs, from the word go. Manners — they don't know what manners are ” — here Mrs. Stanton gasped ; but the torrent rolled on, quite regardless of any gasp of hers.

In a few moments, at the faint suggestion of a pause, Mr. Stanton made another effort. “ I'm glad you are so truly American in your tastes,” he said. “ But surely you like Paris ? ”

“ Ah, that's another story ! Paris is the place for me. Right up to date, you know. Of course, it is n't quite like New York ; but the stores are good and the girls — oh, my — the girls — we can't beat them at home anyhow.”

Mr. Stanton saw that this was the most unfortunate start of all, and hastened to shift to a more frigid locality, although he already thought, with some concern, of what would happen when he reached the end of his geographical topics. “ Let me see. You went to Switzerland from Paris, I believe ? ”

“ I have n't been to Switzerland yet, and I don't want to go. I don't see why anybody should want to tramp up mountains just to roll down 'em again. They say there are good hotels there ; but give me a nice flat country like there is round Chicago. The Alps — I've got no use for 'em.”

Here Mr. Parsons was moved to attempt a diversion, thinking the young man had had it all his own way long enough. “ What your young friend says is interesting, Mr. Stanton. He ex-

presses the natural instinct of humanity, which runs to plain, arable land. All our passion for the frightful and the picturesque is an acquired taste, like pickles — like pickles. The Romans hated mountains and found them hideous and horrible. So did the men of the Renaissance. It was only a hundred years ago that Switzerland was invented. Rousseau and Byron discovered it, just as Watt discovered the steam engine. Ah, those fine lines of Byron —

‘To me

High mountains are a feeling.’

Now Ruskin ” —

But Edgar could n’t stand this. Mr. Parsons’s first sentence had met his approval. After that, his thoughts wandered to his ordinary interests; and it suddenly occurred to him that Mr. Stanton was a millionaire and well known on the New York market. “I say, Mr. Stanton,” he interrupted sharply, “what do you think of the market at home? That was a neat slump in Buttersville and Zion, was n’t it?”

Mr. Stanton glanced at Parsons in piteous apology, and answered stiffly: “I have n’t looked over the papers for a day or two. I try to keep business out of my mind here as much as possible.”

Edgar stared. “Out of your mind? I don’t see the use of that. I should think you’d come to grief pretty quick, if you did keep it out of your

mind. It was n't by keeping it out of your mind that you made your pile, now was it?"

The old friend of Mr. Payne senior remembered that friendship and tried to keep his patience. "No," he answered; "when I was a young man and had to succeed and make my way, I thought about money most of the time and about very little else. That is just why I think of other things now, as far as possible."

"Well," observed Edgar with a grin, intended to show that he knew he was being fooled, "that beats me. But I suppose it don't do to talk about these things before women and ministers." Then he added meditatively: "Besides, I guess you've got it all tucked away in gilt-edge bonds — huh — three and a half per cent. Would n't suit me, I know. When I get where you are, I just want to see it pile up — and pile up — Oh, I tell you, there's nothing like it!"

There was a pause, while the speaker remained absorbed in the ecstatic contemplation of his future. Mr. Stanton sought in vain for some safe and possible subject of conversation. Before he had found any such, Edgar glanced round the company and got on his feet. "Well," he said, "guess I'll be going! I've got some papers to read at home. I thought father'd kind of like to have me come round."

As he made his way towards the door, Mr. Stanton, who rose, as did the others, tried to utter

some polite regret at the sudden departure, or at least, some manner of farewell; but the words stuck in his throat.

"You stay, Gordy," said Edgar, as he went out. "Stay and praise me up," he added, with a significant smile.

CHAPTER X

A HINT OF EROS

CHILL and solemn silence settled on the company when Edgar had departed. Gordon had stepped forward, as if to take his leave, and stood quietly, with his hand on the corner of the mantel. Priscilla dropped back into her chair again at the further side of the room, and, in a second or two, the others did the same. An expression of mild amusement, restrained by politeness, settled on Mr. Parsons's countenance. Uncle Edwin looked distressed, to a point that was painful to see. Mr. Stanton's face suggested disgust, varied with some anxiety; and his wife's showed nothing but disgust pure and simple. Gordon watched them all, feeling, for his own part, a very great sense of relief. After this scene, no further explanations as to Edgar's character would be likely to be required from him. He did feel sorry that things had turned out in this way; but he had foreseen the catastrophe so long that he was not in the least taken aback.

At length Mr. Stanton spoke. "Has Mr. Payne lived very much with his son, Mr. Gordon?"

"No, sir, very little, hardly at all. Edgar's mother died, as you know, when he was very young.

His father has been busy always. The son has generally lived with — with servants, when he was not away at school.”

“That has been unfortunate, I think.”

Again there was a moment's pause. “I suppose I had better say good-night also,” began Gordon, with hesitation; for he much preferred to remain, and he could hardly let his intercourse with the Stantons end just there.

But Mrs. Stanton interrupted him cordially. “By no means. Why should you? We hope you will make yourself at home with us whenever you are disposed to do so.”

And Priscilla spoke up, in her clear, quiet voice: “Come, Mr. Gordon, I want you to go on with your good work of this morning. There are a dozen questions I want to ask. I have my Baedeker here all ready.”

So, for the moment, Edgar was put aside, if not forgotten. The two young people established themselves at a table on the further side of the room, with Baedeker before them, and their elders continued chatting round the fire; or rather, Mr. Parsons chatted, and the others listened. Now and then the fervor of his eloquence would break in on Gordon's murmured explanations.

“First,” began Priscilla, “I want to see pictures. Where are the pictures?”

“Pictures?” was the dubious answer. “In Rome? There are no pictures.”

"No pictures?" She looked at him with dismay. "Why, but all along I have been saying to myself, 'Wait till you get to Rome.'"

"Titian and Botticelli did not satisfy you, then? You hoped to improve on Botticelli's *Venus*?"

"No, no — it was because I enjoyed those so much. I wondered how there could be anything more beautiful; but in Rome I thought of course there must be."

Gordon leaned back and looked at her. "You are a very remarkable young lady," he said.

"Ah, now you're making fun of me. You think I'm one of those awful females who want to improve themselves. I'm not, the least bit in the world. I'm perfectly contented with myself, as the Lord made me."

"Then you certainly are a remarkable young lady."

She put the observation aside with a little wave of her hand. "But I enjoy what is beautiful — what seems to me beautiful — even if I do come from Chicago. And nothing in Europe has pleased me like the pictures."

"Not even the shops in Paris?"

"Ah, well, perhaps we must except the shops in Paris. But now about the pictures in Rome — what do you mean by saying there are none? How about the Sistine Chapel — and the Aurora — and Beatrice Cenci?"

"Well, what more is there? Sacred and Pro-

fane Love, and Guido's Saint Michael, and one here and one there, mostly Bolognese at that. But there are no great collections, like the Louvre and the Uffizzi. I'd rather have the pictures in the little gallery at Antwerp than all there are in Rome."

"Positively, I want to go away," was the depressed answer. "What is there here then?"

Before he replied, Gordon paused a moment to listen to one of Mr. Parsons's tirades, which had reached its climax. "Literature?" he cried, "where is there any literature in America? Long-fellow?" He began to grind an imaginary hand-organ:—

"Tell me not, in mournful numbers,
Life is but an empty dream,'—

Whittier? I believe 'Maud Muller' is supposed to be a ballad,—a ballad in sugar candy, with a pink shepherdess and white sheep in a confectioner's window. Emerson, you say? Ah, that was a man. 'Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous.' That has the right ring. That is glorious. But he was so thin—no blood in him—no passion—all intellect—all brain. The truth is, that atmosphere of Boston Unitarianism is hopeless—hopeless—hopeless"—the last words died away in a peculiar snuffling murmur, and the conversation dropped for a moment.

"Do you know this Mr. Parsons? He seems interesting," said Priscilla to Gordon softly.

"He is interesting — one of the most interesting talkers I ever knew."

Priscilla turned over the leaves of Baedeker in silent abstraction, thinking, perhaps, of Edgar, or of something else. Gordon watched her, and she was charming to watch, her dimples smoothed into seriousness, her long lashes half drooped over her eyes. "I have seen girls from Chicago before," he began; "but I never saw one like you. Most of them don't care for pictures."

"There are a good many girls in Chicago, you know. Why should they all be alike? In the school that I went to, there actually were a number of girls who might almost have come from the East, though I suppose an eastern man will hardly believe it. But don't let's talk about me. It is n't interesting. I want to talk about Rome. I want to get into the Roman atmosphere. I have n't yet."

"That's just it. You've got to get into the atmosphere. You can't do it quickly. At least, I don't know of any way. Perhaps losing yourself for twenty-four hours all alone in the Catacombs might answer. It is n't any one thing. There are no pictures, as I told you. And the sculpture gets to be rather white and melancholy. It cools your enthusiasm, when you find that the best of it, after deducting modern toes and noses, is mostly Roman copies of late Greek imitations of unknown originals. The later churches are tawdry, ugly, and vulgar; and the old ones are just as ugly, and cold

and ruinous. The ancient ruins themselves are fragmentary and puzzling individually, and depressing and monotonous in the mass. Then, worse than anything else, is modern Rome, which is hideous, and the modern Roman, who is unspeakable. Yet, after all, Rome is Rome. When you 've been here a few weeks, you 'll find it getting hold of you somehow or other ; and when it has once got hold, it never lets go."

Priscilla watched him and listened with a keen, quiet interest that was very flattering. "You spoke of the ruins," she said. "Does one care for those?"

"Yes, *one* does, one in a thousand. The real charm of Rome is mainly in the ruins. But don't take any guide. Use your own Baedeker, or your Middleton, and work them out by yourself, wall by wall, stone by stone. It gets to be fascinating finally. I'm sure I can't tell why."

"You must initiate me into these secrets, Mr. Gordon."

They were silent for a minute, as Mr. Parsons's voice rose once more in ardent declamation. He was "having a go," as he called it. "Ah, those analogies are sometimes very curious. People have often said to me that there was a striking resemblance between Shelley and Chopin. I cannot tell, because music is no more to me than a vain hubbub ; but in art, take Reynolds and Gainsborough — they are the exact parallel of Gray and Collins." Then, in answer to a remark of Mr.

Stanton's, "Yes, of course, the English portrait-painters have not the poetry or the passion of Titian or Tintoret. Still they seize character. Not even Vandyke, not even Rembrandt, can touch the Italian work in passion. In the Academy at Venice hang two portraits, one by Titian and one by Tintoret, nearly side by side. I am never weary of comparing them; one glittering and glaring with steely light, full of mystery, intensity, strange suggestion, Shelleyan; the other, simply supreme in quiet human mastery. Velasquez? Ah, Velasquez — that was a man, that. He is beyond them all. Copley? Don't talk to me of Copley — thin, acid, wiry, like the generation he painted. An American genius? You know what Coleridge said, when some one told him Klopstock was a German Milton! 'Yes,' said he, 'a very German Milton.' A very American genius. No, it will take two hundred years to thicken the thin blood of New England Puritanism into anything like passion, and passion is the first element of genius — h'm — h'm — h'm."

"Do you know, Miss Stanton," said Gordon at length, "your suggestion about the ruins confirms me in a scheme I had already thought of."

"What is that?"

"If you really wish to be initiated into that sort of thing, it is much better not to plunge into the Forum and the Palatine and all those old stories, but to begin with some of the less frequented places outside the city. Besides, it is already get-

ting late, and if you do not take excursions very soon, you must wait till spring. Now I had it in mind, before you came, to propose a trip to Hadrian's Villa, which to me is one of the most beautiful and most interesting ruins in the near neighborhood of Rome. Do you think your father and mother would approve?"

"We can ask them, at any rate." Then a curious expression came into her eyes. "Would — a — Mr. Payne go?" she asked.

"It was, of course, chiefly in relation to him that I planned the expedition," answered Gordon quietly.

"Ah, to be sure;" but the response seemed to him just a trifle frigid.

"I am sorry to say, however, that I fear it will be impossible to induce him to come."

There was a decided recovery of cheerfulness in Priscilla's tone as, without taking any direct notice of the remark, she inquired: "Well, what is Hadrian's Villa and where is it? I suppose I ought to know; but I don't."

"Very few people do know, until they get there. It is on the road to Tivoli and it is simply the ruin of a vast villa, built by the Emperor Hadrian. Ahem — further archæological particulars will be best delivered on the spot. Shall we ask your mother?"

So they asked her mother, who, after some further inquiry, condescended to approve, as did Mr. Stanton, expressing at the same time a hope that

Edgar would join the party ; although it did not seem as if he, or any of them, would be seriously depressed by disappointment in that particular. It was arranged that, after allowing the next two days for resting and getting settled in their new surroundings, they would go on the following Monday, if the weather was suitable.

Uncle Edwin was, of course, invited to accompany them, and consented, with entire satisfaction. Ruins and relatives — what could be more delightful? As for Mr. Parsons, he at once invited himself. “ Charming excursion — charming — charming. What a solid people those old Romans were : Europe covered with their highways and baths and amphitheatres, our mouths full of their language, to this very day. Fine old sayings they left us. *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum. Fiat justitia, ruat cælum.* Fine old race ! Fine old race ! ”

But Gordon was just saying farewell, and uncle Edwin with him. So Mr. Parsons interrupted the obituary of the ancient Romans to go along too.

After they had departed, a great silence descended on the Stanton family.

Then Priscilla, pitying her father’s distress, but really not knowing what to say, betook herself to bed, and said nothing. When she was alone and reflected upon the experiences of the day, she felt an unusual sense of contentment, so far as she herself was concerned.

In the parlor Mr. and Mrs. Stanton sat side by side for a few moments, in continued silence.

"Well?" said Mrs. Stanton at length.

"Well," echoed her husband, rather mournfully.

"I am so sorry, George!"

"George is so sorry himself. He is hopeless, isn't he?"

"I should say he was — quite hopeless."

"Of course we have seen very little of him yet. He is young too. He may improve."

Mrs. Stanton was a good woman, a very amiable and lovely woman; but she was not wholly free from the hatred which every wife feels for the friends of her husband's youth, so that she, doubtless, had just a grain of satisfaction in replying: "My dear George, you can't be blind enough to think that such a creature as that can ever marry our Priscilla?"

"No," said George slowly, "I suppose not."

There was silence again for a moment. Mr. Stanton got up and poked the fire. "What shall I write to Harrison?" he asked.

"Oh, just something courteous, affectionate, and non-committal, as you know how to do so nicely. He will understand, without your saying anything definite. The thing will simply work itself out in time, as things always do."

Mr. Stanton listened to his wife's words of wisdom and was somewhat comforted; but his pil-

low, though the softest in the Hotel Bristol, was not a perfectly easy one that night.

Meantime the three departing guests pursued their way homeward. Uncle Edwin separated from the others, after a block or so ; but Mr. Parsons was too much pleased at finding a sympathetic auditor to let him go so easily, and he accompanied Gordon all the way to his lodging. A curious spectacle the old man was, lurching along the street, with his uncertain sailor gait, his head thrust forward, one hand deep in his overcoat pocket, the other clutching Gordon's arm, and now and then stopping him short, while a gray mustache, thrust close into his face, rolled out fragments of rich poetry, celebrating the glories of nature and the solemn states of night. Gordon was keenly alive to the ridicule of the situation, when a passer-by would stop and stare and wonder. Nevertheless, he could not help being touched and carried away, as his companion drew his gaze upward toward the quiet moon, rushing on in a cloudless heaven, and recited the lovely lines from "*Il Penseroso*," great favorites of his, scanning the verses with a strange passion of rhythmic intensity that made them resound and vibrate, like a stringed instrument : —

" To behold the wandering moon,
Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
In the Heaven's wide pathless way."

CHAPTER XI

THE VILLA OF HADRIAN

WHEN Gordon came to think over the Stantons and his interview with them, it did not take him long to conclude that Mr. Payne's plans must come to nothing. Even if Edgar should take a fancy to Priscilla, which was in the last degree improbable, it was quite certain that she would never take a fancy to him. Therefore, any hope of solving the difficulties of the present situation by that means must be at once and entirely abandoned. Strange to say, Gordon felt rather pleased than otherwise with this conclusion. It would not have occurred to him that he himself took any peculiar interest in Priscilla; but it was gratifying to be sure that anything so graceful and charming could not by any possible chance fall into the hands of his hopeful pupil.

Meantime the difficulties of the present situation remained; or rather, they were undoubtedly much aggravated. Not only was it necessary to keep Edgar out of the clutches of the Countess, but it was equally important to induce him to pay such attention to the Stantons as would at least satisfy his father that everything had been done to

bring about the desired result. Now Gordon considered the first of these undertakings to be difficult, the second to be quite impossible. He had a hope that by persuasion and advice and warning he might be able to cool his young friend's ardor for succeeding the late Count Markovski, though even as to that, he was a good deal in doubt; but that Edgar could ever be brought to be devoted or even civil to Priscilla, if he had once made up his mind that she bored him, was altogether vain to expect. What was to be done? Perhaps nothing immediately. Meanwhile Gordon himself would see to it that Priscilla did not lack attention. That part, at least, of his tutorial duties should not be neglected.

"Well," he said to Edgar the next morning, "how did you enjoy your call?"

"Damned dull!" was the rough answer.

"I did n't find it so."

"You like to do the swell to any woman, I believe."

"I consider Miss Stanton a very charming girl, don't you? But then you did n't see much of her."

"Saw enough. I prefer something warmer. Never had any use for the liquid air trust, you know."

Gordon puffed at his cigarette for a few minutes in silence. Edgar was enjoying himself with an old pipe and the unfailing newspaper.

"By the way," began the tutor again, "we've arranged a picnic at Hadrian's Villa for next Mon-

day." No reply. "Did n't you hear my remark?"

"I hear. What do you want me to say?"

"Well, I suppose you 'll go with us?"

"Well, I suppose I won't."

"Now look here, Edgar," remonstrated Gordon, as pleasantly and affectionately as possible, "you know what your father's wishes are in this matter. I don't expect, and he would n't expect, that you should keep on devoting yourself to Miss Stanton, if you don't like her. But Mr. Stanton is one of your father's oldest and best friends. I think you ought at least to show them a civil amount of attention and courtesy."

Edgar answered, without lowering his paper or taking his pipe out of his mouth: "Is that all you've got to say? Well, you can drop it right there. You've earned your money. I'll fix matters with my father myself. All you've got to do, from now on, is just to mind your own business. See?"

"Yes, I see," said Gordon shortly. He got up and left the room. Things were getting pretty bad. Edgar had always been bearish and insolent; but since they had come to Rome he had got a peculiar tone of defiance, which was almost unendurable. Something must be done before long — though Gordon could not imagine what. Meantime it was quite evident that the young man would not take part in the Hadrian's Villa excursion. Well,

they would certainly all enjoy themselves much better for his absence.

During the next two days Gordon was frequently at the Stantons', for necessary arrangements of one sort or another. Edgar never accompanied him; but this seemed to make no difference in the warmth of his welcome. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Stanton had early made inquiries of uncle Edwin about the tutor's history; and when she found that he was connected with the very best Boston families, including the Stantons themselves distantly, and that in every point, except the very important one of riches, he was a gentleman, her maternal heart was set at rest. She encouraged his visits and did nothing whatever to chill Priscilla's evident fancy for him. Anything was better than the extraordinary monster who had made his way into her drawing-room under the shelter of hereditary friendship. Even Mr. Stanton, although he felt frequent yearnings after his old friend's son, and urged Gordon to make every effort to bring Edgar with him, was secretly not dissatisfied to see the sunny, kindly face, without the sour and withered one.

On Saturday the Stantons took a long, general drive in the comfortable carriage which Joseph, the courier, had hired for them. Sunday they went decorously to church. Monday and Tuesday were very rainy, so that the excursion had to be postponed. Priscilla and her mother spent the mornings in the Capitoline Museum, the former having a desire to do

everything thoroughly and systematically. She suggested that Gordon should accompany them ; but he thought it best not to overdo the thing, and pleaded pressing engagements — a French novel and a pipe.

Wednesday morning was all that could possibly be desired, absolutely clear, and, after the chill of dawn had vanished, rich with the mellow warmth of Indian Summer. They started early ; for the trip to Hadrian's Villa demands a whole day, and a long one at that. At half-past eight the three Stantons and uncle Edwin were driving rapidly toward the Porta San Lorenzo, where Gordon and Parsons had agreed to meet them. From the gate you take the steam tram for Tivoli. The journey presents nothing of especial interest, except the vast, barren Campagna itself, with its rolling sweep of little hills and valleys, varied here and there by the remains of an aqueduct or a solitary tower, and in the distance, the huge, bare Sabine Mountains, their gray tops, at that season, just beginning to be touched with snow.

There was not much conversation at first. A picnic, especially when it involves an early start, is like a dinner party. You sit down in formal fashion. You are hurried and heated with the effort of getting there. You put too much lemon on your oysters. Soup is always incompatible with conversation. You have never met your neighbor and cannot imagine how you are going to talk to her for two hours. You wish she were at home and

yourself also. With the first glass of wine, things begin to brighten a little. You discover that your neighbor's grandmother married your aunt's first cousin ; so it is a family dinner, after all — not too family. Then there is another glass of wine, and another, and when the last almond is eaten, you wish it were all to begin again. Thus it is with picnics. Thus it was with this picnic. During the tramway ride, numerous yawns were strangled civilly. Some enthusiasm about the weather and the sky and the mountains was attempted ; but there was nothing hearty in it, and the seniors evidently wished they had not left their beds. Even Mr. Parsons's voice was hushed ; and after once offering his favorite quotation from Emerson about health and a day, he ventured nothing more until they descended at the little station, a few miles this side of Tivoli.

Then they got their first glass of wine, with the touch of that fresh, crisp, country air, in the autumnal morning ; and they all were stirred by it. Uncle Edwin and Mr. Parsons began to pass their simple jests. Mr. and Mrs. Stanton's natural mirth and kindliness gradually showed themselves. As for Priscilla, her young nerves felt the intoxication sooner than any of them ; and quiet as she always was, the bright eye, the quick step, the ready smile, made it very evident that the spell of a day of enchantment was upon her.

It is perhaps needless to recall to any experi-

enced traveler — and every one is an experienced traveler nowadays — that when you first enter the inclosure of Hadrian's Villa, you come at once to the remains of a small Greek theatre, not especially well preserved. From there, you pass through a long avenue of stately cypress trees, in the middle of an olive grove, up a rather steep incline, to the most striking of all ruins, the vast wall of the Poecile. As compared with similar sight-seeing in the city itself, the peculiar charm of the Villa is, undoubtedly, its solitude. The great mob of the personally conducted do not frequent it; and the few more determined tourists who do arrive there are lost in its vastness. You may wander for hours and hardly see a Baedeker. And not only do you escape those of your own peculiar vocation, — you may do that to some extent, even on the Palatine, — but here there is no tumult of humanity in general, no buzz and hum and whirr of city streets, no rattle of trolley cars, no harsh shriek of Italian voices, nothing but the wide quietude of nature and the gentle music of natural sounds.

This fact seemed to be especially borne in upon our friends, as they passed under the cypresses; and Mr. Parsons remarked it.

“What is most striking to me,” said Mr. Stanton, “a poor native of the frigid zone, is the wonderful luxuriance of natural life, at this season. It is the end of November. The frost has eaten everything at home. There may be a foot of snow on

the ground. Here the flowers are in bloom and the birds singing."

"Ah, that is what gives this world of ruin half its charm," Mr. Parsons replied, "the wonderful mixture of death with all this semi-tropical fullness of life. Not but that there would be a charm also in the opposite ; and I think this Villa would be quite as fascinating on a bleak hill in New England, with no spot of green anywhere, and wild snow-blots sweeping over it ; but as it is, the charm of contrasts is inexhaustible — inexhaustible. See those heavy clusters of ivy trailing over that old wall — and the maiden-hair ferns cowering in the crevice, and the blossoms up there, pink and white, nodding, nodding in the breeze, on that broken capital, with its lonely shaft soaring into high heaven — delicious — delicious — h'm — h'm — h'm."

Gordon and Priscilla had gone on ahead during this harangue ; but Mr. Parsons delivered it to the other members of the party, stopping now one and now another, to point out little delightful bits of ruin and of landscape. Then, in a few minutes, they were all reunited on the platform, which remains at the foot of the vast northern wall of the Poecile. Out before them spread a great breadth of sun-swept, wind-swept field, dotted with here and there a shaft, or mouldering capital, or crumbling wall ; and on the slopes falling away beyond, were more fragments, more capitals, more walls, more green and wind and sunlight, to almost

interminable distance ; while over all was silence, except for the rustle of the olive leaves, and the hum of the insects, and now and then a bird, cutting the quiet with sharp, shrill melody.

For a few moments no one spoke. Then uncle Edwin, sweetest and wisest of guides, infinitely modest with his unpretentious learning, said a word or two as to the structure by which they stood : " It was the north wall of the great Poecile, a reproduction of the Portico at Athens, where the old philosophers used to walk and talk with their disciples. I suppose Hadrian loved to walk here, of a sunny morning, and hear from his Greek flatterers such philosophy as may ever come to an emperor's ears."

" But why did he try to imitate a building at Athens ? " asked Priscilla.

" The whole Villa was a mass of imitations of a similar nature. Hadrian, in his earlier days, had been a great traveler, visiting the furthest corners of his dominions. It seems that when he got old and unable to go to strange and curious places, he brought them to him, by building this Villa, with more or less exact reproductions of the various wonders he had seen in his journeyings."

" A beautiful idea," said Mr. Parsons, " and magnificently Roman ; but I do not believe that, in all the original glory of white marble and gold and purple, there was anything finer here than this broad sweep of quiet sunlight. —

'The humblest floweret of the vale,
The simplest note that swells the gale,
The common sun, the air, the skies
To him were opening paradise.'

'The common sun' — common to emperors and poets and peasants — and even to tourists — the poor creatures."

Following the huge wall of the Poecile to the eastward, our friends wandered into the labyrinth of ruin which spreads so thickly toward the beautiful valley of Tempe. They paused a few moments in the curious and shapely swimming-bath, with its marble basin, its little island in the centre, once the resting place of some marvelous statue, its niches carefully disposed for indolent luxury and ease. As they loitered there, Gordon, striking an attitude, regaled them with a burlesque of such pabulum as is humbly swallowed by the personally conducted: "This, ladies and gentlemen, was once the private bath-house of the great Emperor Hadrian. That is, unless it was something else, which in these cases is always more likely. You will observe that it is very large. The bathing arrangements of the ancient Romans were large. This would make it seem as if they stood almost as much in need of such apparatus as their descendants, though the latter have not as yet hit upon the happy thought of resorting to them. I need not tell you, ladies and gentlemen, who the great Emperor Hadrian was. It would occupy too much

time ; and besides, I have no doubt you all know more about it than I do. At any rate, he built this establishment, not himself, but by the sweat of the toiling minions of his oriental despotism. There is no spot more suitable for us to reflect on the great superiority of the United States, where the people are free and are not compelled to build villas for the benefit of a capricious tyrant. Besides, for my own part, I had rather have a two-story wooden house in Chelsea with open plumbing and all the modern conveniences, than a dozen villas with nothing but white marble furniture. Pass to the next, ladies and gentlemen."

They passed to the next, and to the next, through room after room, to which names have been assigned, with more or less likelihood of correctness, by archæological ingenuity : libraries, sleeping apartments, halls of reception and audience, all full of bustle, hurry, and laughter once, all dead, forlorn, and silent now ; yet only forlorn in their association ; for the rich, ardent life of nature was upon them everywhere, warm with the glow of the heavy autumn sunlight.

Finally, they issued forth on the magnificent terrace, which looks towards the northeast, over the vale of Tempe and its olive groves, to the mountains of Tivoli. There they were well satisfied to sit down for their noon rest ; while Joseph, the courier, and two satellites, under his direction, served them with luncheon.

CHAPTER XII

LOVE IN RUINS

OYSTERS, sardines, olives, salads, and cold meats, biscuits of all kinds, jellies, wafers, and cakes, wines of Italy, and champagne — all the superfluities which convert the lowly picnic of the humble into the *fête champêtre* of the rich — were eaten with measureless content. The banquet of the palate, however, seemed poor and mean compared to that of the eye. Impossible to imagine anything more peaceful, more restful than the valley at their feet, its carpet of olives glittering and shimmering in the sunlight, the foliage quiet in the bright and windless air; while beyond, the spurs of the Apennine swept downward, the glowing reds and browns of oak and chestnut mingling irregularly with the sombre darkness of the pines. Here and there a white villa nestled in some little niche or corner. The day continued wonderfully fair, only now and then a soft cloud floating through the blue heaven and trailing its lazy shadow over the shoulders of the mountains.

“What do you know about picnics?” said uncle Edwin, who amused himself by waiting on the ladies, with a napkin over his arm, much to the hor-

ror of the sedate and unhumorous French Joseph. Indeed, a little horror was not unnatural, as the old gentleman stumbled along on the edge of the precipice, with unspeakable peril to a plate of salad held in one hand and a glass of champagne in the other, to say nothing of his own neck. "What do you know about picnics?" he cried. "Ah, it was different in the consulship of James Buchanan — woe be unto him — when I was young!"

"It could not have been nicer, uncle Edwin," said Priscilla, thanking him for his courtesy with a pretty gesture.

"It was, though! when, of an autumn day like this, Mr. Emerson or Henry Thoreau would take me with them on the Concord River. We would row up to Fairhaven Bay in the bright, cool morning, and then rest there and swim and have our luncheon of hard-boiled eggs, milk, doughnuts, and a piece of apple pie."

Priscilla lifted her hands in comic horror. "Yes, you may laugh, Miss Priscilla, all you like; but the Concord River and a doughnut and a piece of apple pie are not to be despised."

"And Mr. Emerson and Henry Thoreau," added the young lady thoughtfully.

"Well, I did n't mean to find any fault with my company here, which is very agreeable, but" —

"But we are neither poets nor philosophers. It is too true. That is why we bring the champagne."

The old man shook his head.

"Then, you had no ruins there."

"That is true enough. No ruins, no shadow of the might of old Rome, no memories of the past. But we had the fields and pastures and sky of New England, which are as good as anything here. And we had the future, with Emerson's prophetic insight to light it up for us. Even for ruins, Thoreau would take you to an Indian mound and find you arrow-heads by the dozen, which may have been older than anything of Hadrian's, for aught I know."

So they chatted through the luncheon hour, the wine adding a trifle of gayety to their serene happiness, and banishing any little trace of fatigue that might have remained from the morning's work. When they had finished, the elders of the party disposed themselves for comfortable digestion in quiet, which, with two or three of them, at least, went so far as deep and conspicuous slumber. Gordon and Priscilla, having the blessed privilege of youth, which one does not fully appreciate till one has lost it, felt no particular inclination to sleep. Therefore they strolled a little further along the great terrace and sat down for a tranquil conversation. Priscilla placed herself on the base of a column, which had probably been dragged away to decorate some two-penny church in Rome; and Gordon, sitting at her feet, leaned back and puffed his cigar most comfortably.

At first they remained silent for a few moments, enjoying the deep, immense silence all about them. Nothing disturbed it but the distant rural sounds which only emphasize the beauty of such tranquillity. A bird, hidden in a bush near by, occasionally dotted the stillness with a clear, soft note. Far away, over beyond the valley of Tempe, two white oxen were dragging a clumsy wagon along a road which wound in and out among the olive-trees. The groaning and creaking of the axle came faintly to their ears.

"I wish I could smoke," said Priscilla. "Then I suppose I should n't feel obliged to talk."

"Which means that I ought to begin the conversation. But why need there be any conversation at all, if we don't feel like it?"

"Why indeed?"

"You might smoke, you know," Gordon continued, after another moment's silence.

"Yes, I might. Would you wish me to?"

"No."

"Well then?"

"Why should you be dependent on what I wish? Women certainly do not wish men to smoke; yet most men do it."

"Why do women let men tyrannize over them in everything?"

"That is a large question. If I were you, I should start a rebellion."

"No," she said, "I don't want to start any-

thing. I have a perfect horror of women who start things."

"That is charming — in the nineteenth century. But surely you belong to a number of clubs?"

"To a few, I am sorry to say. I wish I did n't."

"I thought so. And you attend lectures on cooking and on the nature of the soul?"

"I have."

"I thought so. And you have a secret aspiration to convert somebody?"

"No."

"Or to reform something?"

"No."

"But you have a mission of some kind?"

"No, no, no! No mission whatever."

"I repeat what I said the other day: you are a very extraordinary young woman. But at least, I am sure you have a mysterious ideal?"

"If I have, I keep it to myself." As she spoke, she looked down at him and smiled, and her smile had a peculiar warmth and comfort in it. Its rich and quiet sweetness seemed to tone in with the splendor of the autumn day, and he felt as if he should be glad to bask for a lifetime in both the one and the other.

Again they sat quiet for a few minutes, delighted with the pure luxury of their surroundings. Then Priscilla spoke slowly and a little absently: "You have been catechising me pretty thoroughly. How if I catechise you?"

"By all means. I should like nothing so much. Perhaps it will help me to understand myself a little better. I find myself very puzzling."

"More puzzling than other people?"

"Perhaps not, but a great deal more interesting, you know. Well, what do you want to ask?"

She paused for a minute or two, evidently finding some difficulty in framing her questions. At length she began, point-blank: "What is your occupation in life, Mr. Gordon?"

Gordon looked up at her sharply. "I am a private tutor — worse luck — responsible for the mind, morals, and finances of a hopeful young friend of yours."

She waved her hand with some impatience. "Nonsense! That's not an occupation."

"Oh, isn't it? Perhaps you would like to try it and see. I should be charmed to have you."

"Thank you, so much. Still, you have n't been doing that all your life."

"No, I have n't. And don't mean to all my life. I see. You want my autobiography. You shall have the copyrighted edition — gilt edges — half-calf. Chapter I. — From the cradle to the velocipede. Chapter II. — An idle boy. Chapter III. — In love and out again. Chapter IV. — Harvard College. Chapter V. — Artist *manqué*. Chapter VI. — Private tutor — *manqué* also. Epitome, epilogue, epigram, epitaph: He did nothing and was happy."

"Have you always been happy?"

"Why, yes, until I got this last job on my hands. Even now it is very difficult for me to be otherwise — though I know it is highly improper. You see, I have perfect health, and as our friend over there says, 'Give me health and a day' — I will spare you the rest. I have no money, so nobody hates me; yet I always seem to have everything I want. Then I love to watch, watch, watch, — there is so much to see in the world. People are so irresistibly amusing. Life is just like a theatre to me all the time."

"But there are tragedies in it."

"Yes, I know. Still, after all, they are not *my* tragedies. And then, they are over so quickly. And then, people might almost always help them, if they wanted to. And then, there is so much comedy right beside them. One can always shut one's eyes, you know."

"Can one — always?" Priscilla leaned her head on her hand thoughtfully. A cloud somewhat heavier than most veiled the sun. The bird in the bush stopped singing. Then the sun burst out again and the bird began once more. "You say you have been an artist?" Priscilla went on.

"No. I said I had tried to be."

"But if you tried to be and failed, which I don't believe, didn't that make you unhappy?"

"No, that's the worst of it. If it had made me so, I suppose I might have succeeded. I have

known so many men positively wretched at seeing others succeed, when they could not. I can enjoy other people's successes, even when I fail. An unfortunate disposition, is n't it?"

"That depends upon the point of view." But there was just the hint of a quiet smile about her mouth, though Gordon did not see it, which suggested that she did not have much fault to find. "But you will go back to painting," she continued, "when you" —

"When I have completed my present failure? It is possible enough. If one is bound to fail, it is more agreeable to fail in doing something attractive."

"And when shall you complete your present failure, as you call it?"

"Ah, that is an unkind question to ask me," Gordon said, with sudden energy, "when you know it might all have been settled by yourself." In spite of her decided gesture of disagreement, he went on: "Oh, yes, it might. You know it just as well as I do. Here have I brought this amiable young man three thousand miles over sea and land, just for the sole purpose of marrying him to you — and now you won't take up with the project in any way whatever."

"But, Mr. Gordon, really, why lay it all to me? It appears that the young man is not very ardent in his suit, to say the least."

"Would you marry him, if he asked you?"

"That is a direct question, certainly. Do you think a young lady ought to answer such a one unless it is asked seriously? However, I think I may safely say no, without any hesitation at all."

"Well, then. And if he is n't ardent in his suit, is n't it all your fault?"

"That is not a very polite way of putting it, perhaps."

"Well, but is n't it all your fault? I say it is. Why could n't you have been different, as a young woman from Chicago, or anywhere else, might be, — loud, you know, rings, bangles, and slang; horsey, doggy, golfy, sporty, — I say, why could n't you?"

"I'm sorry to disappoint you."

"You have disappointed me woefully. What am I to say to the young man's papa?"

"I don't know, but from what I remember of Mr. Payne — I have n't seen him for several years, — and from what I hear of him, he must be quite different from his son."

"He is different. If it were he, he would have fallen in love with you before this and you with him. Do you think that will make him any more inclined to be lenient toward me?"

They were both silent for a moment, neither of them appearing to be much cast down by the situation. The flattery hidden in Gordon's mock reproaches was very sweet to Priscilla and she did not in the least regret having failed to make herself agreeable to her intended suitor.

The other members of the party were moving now, having had all necessary repose. They had gathered themselves together and were slowly approaching Priscilla and her companion.

"It is hardly necessary to explain that I was not finding any fault with you," said Gordon softly.

"Were n't you now? After all?"

"You are simply one of those unconscious instruments of the evil designs of Fate — like Helen of Troy, you know. Of course, you could n't help being charming and amiable and attractive."

"Oh, no, of course not. I *have* tried." Here the others were upon them and the peregrination through the Villa began again.

It was now long after noon and time served but scantily for exploring the vast ruins, of which they had as yet visited hardly more than a corner. They passed through room after room, bare, blank, deserted, silent; palace halls, courts of justice, little cells, where senators and generals had been crowded together, like the French nobility in the cramped corners of Versailles, baths, libraries, open gardens and porticoes — everywhere the same tranquillity, broken only by some petty group of tourists, or the faint, tender sounds of nature; and as they walked, an immense weariness came upon them, partly physical, partly resulting from the ever-present weight of years and the intolerable tyranny of death.

Then they came out into the vaguer and more open portion of the Villa to the south, where the

ruins were still more ruinous, more overgrown with grass and shrubs, almost unrecognizable; and where the descending sun, shining still with mellow and glorious radiance, changed their sharper melancholy to mild and gentle contemplation.

As they strayed through the vast length of the Canopus, uncle Edwin said something about the meaning of the word; that Hadrian, in building it, had tried to reproduce the delicious water gardens of the Nile, where, from morning till night, revelers floated up and down in the idle tide of pleasure, crowning their boats with gay garlands, wafted by purple sails, singing merry songs, fluting, dancing, living carelessly, as they did in the golden world.

"But could he reproduce it?" asked Priscilla. "He could have the gay garlands and the flutes and the purple sails; but could he, with all his wealth and all his empire, fleet the time carelessly, or rather, in spite of all his empire and his wealth?"

"Ah, as to that history saith not," answered uncle Edwin.

"I don't know whether he could, I know I could," added Gordon, a little dreamily.

"Well, yes, I believe you could, Mr. Gordon," said Priscilla.

"Is that a compliment?"

"A very, very great compliment." It was quite clear that she spoke seriously.

But Mr. Parsons was regaling Mrs. Stanton with bits of Shelley: "Yes, he was the poet of

solitude. Ruin, desolation, with just a gleam of spiritual hope — that was his element.

‘ I love all waste and solitary places.’

He wrote the “ Prometheus Unbound ” in the Baths of Caracalla, which were ruins then, such as these are now, vines and ivy trailing around him, and the old walls towering raggedly against the blue sky above. Do you remember that wonderful stanza in which he describes Lechlade Churchyard? I always think of it in a place like this.” And he recited, with oppressive grandeur : —

“ The dead are sleeping in their sepulchres ;
And mouldering as they sleep, a thrilling sound,
Half sense, half thought, among the darkness stirs,
Breathed from their wormy beds, all living things around ;
And mingling with the still night and mute sky
Its awful hush is felt inaudibly.”

“ Don’t, Mr. Parsons,” said Mrs. Stanton. “ It goes right down my back.”

“ Ah, well, ladies are not generally very appreciative of poetic melancholy — h’m — h’m — h’m.”

So they wandered on again, past the baths and the stadium, to the Poecile, whence they had started. There they went out to the platform, built above the throng of little cells, which were once the dwellings of the slaves, a vast stretch of open ground, looking toward the west, over the olive orchards and the Campagna, toward Rome. Of course, nothing is to be seen of the city itself ; but the huge dome of St. Peter’s hangs, like a leaden

cloud, on the horizon, and very little imagination is required to picture the old Emperor, sitting there silent in the autumn sunlight, looking toward his capital, so much larger then than now, hearing in fancy the hum of humanity tramping its busy streets, and comparing with that endless rumor and tumult the blessed quiet of his rich retreat.

"Shall we ever have an emperor in our country," said uncle Edwin, "to build palaces for himself with the labor of the million and overturn the world with his wars and luxury?"

"No, no!" answered Mr. Parsons. "Mankind will never go back to such barbarism as that. The rights of all men will be respected. Liberty will never be lost again. Wealth is vulgar and war outgrown." Then, turning to Priscilla and Gordon, who were sitting quietly a little apart: "You young people don't care for politics and emperors; but you do feel nature and poetry. You can't take your eyes off the dim grandeur of that dome. That's right. That's right. But you don't remember the two lines of Shelley, which express such an object to perfection, —

'Pinnacled dim in the intense inane,' —

and —

'Islanded in the immeasurable air.'

Poetry is like the sun-drenched light, which gives an added, almost unutterable beauty to things already beautiful in themselves."

Neither Priscilla nor Gordon responded very much to these rhapsodies ; but they felt them. The mood that comes at such times and in such places is a very complicated one, a fabric woven of a hundred different strands, each frail, delicate, almost impalpable ; yet the perfect tissue holds its place in memory long, long after. Just what elements, in the sum total of feeling, each of them owed to the other, neither cared at that moment to examine. But as they made their way homeward, not loudly, but happily, they both felt that they had moved a step nearer to each other ; and in these matters a step is more than a league stride in all the other movements of the world. With Priscilla, however, the feeling was much more definite than with Gordon. She was, by nature, somewhat inclined to reflect on her own doings ; but he had no disposition to reflect on his own or other people's. He had spent many rich days with pretty girls in the sunlight, and this might be simply another, to remember, when he should find himself

“ Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”

CHAPTER XIII

CHOPIN AND SUICIDE

THE fine weather which had favored the excursion to Hadrian's Villa was followed by day after day of such chilly, depressing cold, cloudiness, and drizzle as is usual in sunny Italy, especially in November and December. Large, ragged masses of gray mist trailed over the sky, enveloping the Eternal City and all its surroundings with dampness and misery. Even the gay and philosophical Romans frowned, as they wrapped themselves more closely in their cloaks; and the homesick *forestieri* did their sight-seeing with a lagging step and cold at the heart.

Gordon did not suffer from cold at the heart; still the weather may have counted for something in the unaccustomed condition of annoyance in which he found himself. The few words which he had exchanged with Priscilla on Edgar's affairs at the picnic had made it perfectly and finally evident that nothing was to be hoped for in that direction. If any confirmation were needed, Edgar supplied it by his constantly increasing devotion to the Countess Markovski. It is true, Gordon gathered from

a remark dropped here and there that the youth did not very often succeed in seeing his lady-love. But he certainly made frequent efforts to see her ; and his failures exasperated a disposition not naturally the most amiable, until living with him became a sort of nineteenth-century martyrdom. The fact that he failed was also most disquieting to Gordon ; for he knew that if the lady really wished to get rid of her admirer, she could have cured him in twenty-four hours. If she did not do this, the inference was that she was simply holding off to entrap him more securely.

Under these circumstances, what was to be done ? The tutor avoided this question by running about as much as possible. He did not go to the Stantons', though he could scarcely have told why. It certainly did not definitely occur to him that it was wiser to keep away from Priscilla. But he went among his old artist friends, lounged in their studios, smoked, chatted, and told stories. He dawdled at Mrs. Barton's, called on one or two young women and showed them about the city, even sketched a little, with most unsatisfactory results, did all he could, in short, to forget that amusing himself was not his sole and sufficient duty.

But he could not forget it altogether. Visions of Papa Payne haunted his morning slumbers and framed themselves in wreaths of smoke out of his most peaceful pipe. Something must be done, something must certainly be done. What ?

Various solutions presented themselves, none very satisfactory. He could not bring himself to speak frankly to Edgar about the Countess — not yet. It might come to that. Meantime, what if he should go to see Antonia and have a talk with her? He had no very definite idea in doing so. He might — no, it was too absurd — yes, he might run off with the lady himself — if she would go with him. It would be ruin, certainly, ruin body and soul. There are follies of youth and follies of middle age, and the latter are unpardonable and irrevocable. Then how little would be gained? To be sure, Edgar would be saved from this particular misfortune; but he would not be one whit nearer to Priscilla, and he would be certain to fall into some other of the black abysses which gaped for him. Yet, on the other hand, he, Gordon, would have ceased to be responsible, he would have capped the climax of his failures with one piece of colossal self-sacrifice. It is so rare in life that a temptation comes in the form of a colossal self-sacrifice: ought he really to let it go?

Yes, he would see the Countess Markovski and try to divine her plans. Then he smiled at the idea of his divining anything which the Countess Markovski wished to conceal. As to his own course, he would be governed entirely by circumstances. Only great men and fools act on impulse; and one cannot tell which one is, till one has followed that method for a certain length of time.

It was a dark afternoon, even more rainy, damp, and detestable than those that had preceded it, when Gordon made his way to 24 Via Ludovisi and rang the bell at the door of the Countess. He had passed a dismal, homeless morning, loafing about the forlorn sitting-room in his lodgings, reading a little, while Edgar stuck unresponsively to some financial column or other. Now, as he was shown into the snug, quiet drawing-room, with two or three candles, giving a doubtful, pleasant twilight in the middle of the winter afternoon, and with a bright fire glowing in the grate, he breathed a long sigh of relief and comfort.

The Countess was sitting at the piano, playing a mazurka of Chopin. Though she saw him when he entered, she did not rise till she had finished the piece, leisurely. Her performance showed no special signs of training, but there was a languid, passionate grace about it, which seemed to harmonize with the very spirit of the Polish composer.

When she had struck the last chord, she sat perfectly still for an instant, looking straight at Gordon; and he almost thought her large dark eyes were full of tears. Then she got up slowly and came towards him, with both hands extended. He had never seen her more lovely. She wore a plain morning-gown of black silk, simple and straight, with soft white ruching at the throat. The only color was a bit of lavender ribbon about her wrists.

As she held out her hands before her, the opal flashed on them.

"*Che brutto tempo!*" she said softly. "*Amico*, — you are so good to come. I had an instinct of it and told them I was at home to no one but you. You always bring sunshine. What, no?" as Gordon shook his head in doubt. "You must. I need it. I am like a fairy drooping under a toadstool, when it rains so long and so drearily."

"It is better to be a fairy at any time," Gordon murmured. Loud speech in that atmosphere seemed somehow impossible.

"No, no," she answered vehemently, still standing, but letting go his hand, which she had held till then. "Not a fairy! It is best to be a machine, with a steel heart and a hard rubber tire — hard, hard, anything, so it be hard." She turned and walked across the room. "Come," she said. "Draw up a chair for you and one for me. Let us have a quiet chat — just as if we were man and wife, you know — before the domestic hearth. It is odd, but sometimes I feel as if I should like a domestic hearth — I, who can never by any chance have one."

Gordon did as she bade him and sat down beside her in silence. He did not want to speak or think — yet.

"You don't talk," she began. "Then the weather has affected even you — and living in lodgings — with that awful creature." She made a little ges-

ture of disgust. "How weary one gets of it all. It is n't the ugliness of life, or the wickedness, or even the suffering; it is the flatness, the dreary, dull monotony, just one same even plain, out, out, out to the end of the world." Her flat, spread hands hinted at the endless dullness of her spirit. Then she rested her elbows on the arm of her chair, her face on her hands, and gazed at him intently. "I was thinking about suicide, when I was playing that mazurka, as you came in. Do you ever think about suicide?"

"Never," replied Gordon placidly. He was very comfortable.

"No, I dare say not. But I do. Do you suppose those who think about it so much ever do it? I'm not afraid, you know. And I'm so curious. Oh, so curious. Will one be so bored — over on the other side? Will it be new and fresh and exciting? I think Hell would be exciting. But Heaven — they all do their best to make one sick of it beforehand. Then, after all, it seems braver to fight it out here. Let them pile mountains of ennui on top of one; one can find or make amusement still."

"Oh, yes," Gordon agreed. "I never had to work so hard for it. Amusement is much easier to come by than tobacco."

"Child," she said, laughing and laying her hand on his, "eternal child!"

They sat silent for a few minutes. The fire glowed and crackled pleasantly before them. Gor-

don was surprised to find himself thinking of Priscilla and their chat of a few days before, and not of his companion or present circumstances at all.

But the Countess Markovski was determined to be thought of. "Well," she began in a more practical and business-like tone. "Well, when is the marriage?"

"Marriage!" Gordon ejaculated, almost as if he had waked up in a strange place.

"I said marriage. You are dull to-day, my friend." There was a grain of acid in her tone. "Master and Miss Millions — surely they — or you — have made a match of it by this time."

It was an uninteresting subject. "Don't ask me," was Gordon's weary answer. "You are simply impertinent, Countess. As if you did not know more about it than I do."

"I know?" laughed she mischievously. "Well, yes, perhaps I do. Poor boy! He did undertake something that was too much for him, and everything went crooked, and the queen and knave would not come together, and butterflies should not be set to do the serious work of life — so they should n't." Then she sat straight up and looked right before her and spoke as clear and harsh as a salesgirl who has been at the trade thirteen years. "Now, Mr. Gordon, let us talk business. You felt it to be your duty to marry young Payne to this piece of light-haired, blue-eyed absorbent

cotton, who was brought here on purpose. Oh, I've seen her, I know her — right through and through — so." She made the gesture of unraveling a skein of silk. "You can't do it, of course. Anybody — even you — might have known you could n't beforehand."

She paused for an instant. Gordon listened, but showed no sign of any particular interest. "Well?" he asked.

"Well! It is well — for me. Do you understand? I am going to marry the young fellow myself. I want his millions — well," as Gordon made a gesture of irritation — "his father's millions then. What difference does it make? I am tired of this life, tired of being a Bohemian, or a Pole, for nothing. I want respectability. I know very well that it is the most contemptible thing in the world when you've got it, the emptiest, the most tedious" —

"Nothing could ever make you tedious, Countess."

"Or respectable. When did you learn this trick of sneering? It does n't become you. You did n't do it three years ago. But that is just what I can be — respectable. And that is why respectability is such a poor thing. But I want it. And I want money. I am tired of bills and shifts and shifty speculations, and footmen who would take one's pocketbook, if there were anything in it, and cut one's throat, if it did n't spoil their only chance of

getting their wages. I want ease and comfort. I am getting old."

"Do you want Edgar Payne?" asked Gordon half absently.

"No, child, no. But what wouldst thou have? One cannot get everything for nothing. Really, I never saw such a creature in all my varied experience. But I can manage him." She paused, and for a few seconds there was silence. Then she spoke again: "Well, what do you say? Will you let me alone?"

Gordon made no answer at first, no direct answer at all. Now was the moment, the critical moment. But somehow the suggestion of the domestic hearth lingered with him, and Priscilla's face kept coming back. Yet what else was he to do, what else could he do, in the face of such a clear declaration as had just been made to him? At length he spoke, in a low, hoarse voice: "Antonia, you seem to have forgotten some of the things you were reminding me of the other day — in this very room."

She turned upon him like lightning. "Ah, you are such a child, Robert Gordon, such a child, seen through so easily! That is your forlorn hope, is it, and you are going to throw yourself into the breach, when every other chance fails? You thought I could be imposed on by such a trick as that?" Then, with one of those marvelous changes which were the greatest of her charms,

she turned and leaned towards him, her dark eyes full upon him, her voice as soft as far-heard music: "Well, you thought right. I will walk straight into the trap with my eyes open. I will be fool to the very limit of human folly. I can't understand or fathom the love that I have for you. Why is it, why, why? You are handsome, yes. You are clever, yes. But it is not that. It is the sunshine in you. Oh, how I missed it when you left me! Just a little aching spot here. It would go for moments and I would think I had forgotten. Then it came back and stung me with such a fierce, sharp, sweet pain. My sunshine! My sunshine! *Roberto! Roberto l'angelo, or il diavolo, Roberto mio*, come with me and let me have sunshine always. Come! Come." She dropped her voice to a whisper, far-away and soft, yet with a quality that seemed as if it might pierce to the utmost limit of the world.

And he heard her, and he answered nothing. The more she spoke, the more impossible her summons seemed to him. Yet he saw she loved him. It was, indeed, difficult to believe in the depth or permanence of her affection. What could it be but wayward caprice and flighty fancy, hollow, elusive, and deceiving as a wreath of moonlit mist? Yet, after her fashion, she did love him, and three years ago the assurance of that fact would have been an epitome of heaven. But now it was strangely indifferent and cold to him; and still, in

the tranquil gloom, he saw the calm face and the deep blue eyes with the golden hair above them. So he sat and answered nothing. Outside the wind raged in sudden, unequal blasts, and dashed the drops against the window panes.

"Very well," she said, at length, in a voice a little hoarse, but calm and cold once more. "You have n't even the poor courage to make a fool of yourself completely. *N'en parlons plus*. Tell me, then, is it peace or war?"

"Peace, Countess, certainly, if you ask my inclination."

"I don't ask your inclination. It is n't worth the trouble of my considering it. I simply ask you, will you let me marry this — fellow, without any interference?"

"I can't do that."

"You can't! You can't! You won't! And yet you can't help it. What can you do against me?"

"What, indeed? Still there is a certain obligation" —

She did not condescend to notice this plea. "I suppose your next step will be to describe me to your — promising pupil," she said, "to give him my history?"

"Countess — what can I do? This marriage will be wretched for him, wretched for you, for everybody. I must use such weapons as I have in my hands."

"Ah, yes," she asserted scornfully. "But don't

pretend to care for my welfare. Don't attempt a hypocrisy which will never suit you. Poor butterfly, whose soul shines through your eyes, as clearly as if you wore it on your sleeve. And, I suppose, you will give him a full and succinct history of your own little experience with the terrible Countess, and how she roared, and what luck you had to get out of the cage alive."

Gordon began to perceive that he was not having a good time of it. "I do not think it will be necessary to mention myself at all," he said, "certainly not at present. Can I tell you, can I make you believe how horrible this all is to me?"

"Why, yes," she answered, with a cold, hard smile, "I can understand that it is n't pleasant. Do you think I am sorry for you? But then I quite agree with you that it will not be necessary to bring our own relations into question at all. When you have narrated in detail all you know about me in other ways and all you have heard, you will doubtless gain your end, and everybody will be happy. Only, I advise you to go back to America with the dear, just as quickly as ever you can. And now, don't you think you had better terminate this interview, as the newspapers say, and leave me once more to Chopin and suicide?"

Gordon did think so. "Antonia," he said, as he rose, "you are cruel to me."

Even in that dim light, he was stopped by the whiteness of her face. "Cruel!" she repeated. "O God!" Then she resumed her ordinary manner, with no apparent effort. "This has n't been a pleasant call, has it? If I were you, I would n't come again."

CHAPTER XIV

A CONVERSION

As the Countess said, the call had not been pleasant. Gordon, in thinking it over during the next few days, felt that it had been very unpleasant, and, what was much contrary to the ordinary habit of his nature, he was not able to stop thinking of it on that account. He had appeared to great disadvantage himself; but that did not trouble him much. What was more important, he had not accomplished his purpose and seemed to be farther away than ever from his final object. That troubled him a good deal.

Antonia had declared positively that she wished to marry Edgar and would marry him, and she had referred to any effort that Gordon might make to prevent her with a contempt which was fully shared by Gordon himself. Nevertheless, he felt that he was just as much bound as ever to make such effort, more bound. Only, how should he make it, when? Should he get hold of Edgar at once and go into an elaborate revelation of what the past of such a woman was? How could he do it? The very thought was well-nigh intolerable to him.

Even now, after all, would it be absolutely necessary? Edgar was no fool, with all his oddities. Would he really do anything so foolish? If this was a rather infirm reliance, as Gordon confessed to himself it was, would the Countess do anything so foolish, in spite of all she had said? Her will was iron when it was fixed; but it was so seldom fixed. Was it fixed now? That she understood Edgar perfectly and despised him and loathed him, was beyond possibility of question. Would she then, fine and sensitive as her nature was, with all its waywardness and all its wickedness, would she deliberately bind herself, sell herself to what she loathed and despised? Again, it was probable she would. Still, there was a chance, and on the strength of it Gordon delayed action a little longer. "Let us wait and watch a day or two," he said to himself.

The Countess's tactics at first seemed to encourage him. Edgar tried again and again to see her and failed. He complained openly to Gordon, having no one else to whom he might impart the irresistible confidences of love.

"Hang it! What's the matter with the woman?" he said. "What's the use of drawing a feller on and then turning your back on him?"

"What's the use indeed?" was Gordon's philosophic answer. "Why do you waste any more time on her? She's not worth it."

"Oh, that'll do, Gordy! You're always work-

ing for that pale-haired Stanton thing. I'd give more for five minutes of the Countess Markovski than for five years of her."

It was evident that the lady was holding off. But, alas, when Gordon came to think it over, sitting on the Pincian in the afternoon sunlight, with a cigar in his mouth and his eyes half shut, the holding off did not seem quite so encouraging. It might be because she had not made up her mind, but it was much more likely to be because she had. He must have it out with Edgar. That was evident, and at the first opportunity he would.

So much having been decided, he dismissed the matter from his thoughts, leaned back, and, with idle curiosity, watched the gay and motley crowd, as it passed slowly by him. The exhibition on the Pincian is certainly tame and second-rate compared with Hyde Park or even with the Bois de Boulogne. Still, on a bright winter afternoon, one can find amusement in it, if one is not too critical. It is, at any rate, cosmopolitan enough. First a pseudo-Russian, after the fashion of the Countess Markovski, will drive past you, leaning back in her luxurious furs, with a furtive glance cast now and then at some impudent Italian officer, who salutes her, militarily. Then, perhaps, comes an old English dowager, looking as much as possible like the late queen, fat horses, fat coachman, fat lap-dog, lean companion, oh, so lean and weary. Then two Prussians in a cab, with their mustaches pointing

to their ears, looking as if the world was made for them. Then, in another cab, particularly shabby and miserable, three American girls, laughing, gesticulating, and generally scandalizing the foreigner. Then a cardinal, black, black, all black. Then a Parisienne — marquise — or otherwise. Then a gorgeous ambassador. Then two country curates, or, it may be, a New York millionaire. So it goes. And to be idle and watch it all is infinitely more amusing than to think about naughty countesses and tedious pupils and the difficult problems of life generally.

By and by Gordon was aware of a face that he recognized, not the first by any means, but the first that he had recognized with pleasure. Priscilla was driving alone in the great carriage, leaning back with as much nonchalant ease and grace as any countess of them all, and Gordon said to himself that neither Pole nor Parisienne was any lovelier than she. She was dressed all in gray, — gray hat, gray furs, gray gloves; and the rosy hue of her face, heightened by the fresh west wind, contrasted charmingly with the even, cold tone of her costume.

She at once beckoned Gordon to the side of the carriage, opening the door for him, since she could not stop the general movement to let him chat with her. It was a bit unconventional; but he knew that Americans could still do what they liked, in Rome especially. Besides, his mother had not brought him up to resist temptation, as the reader will already have perceived.

"Well," Priscilla began, "I have quarreled with you, Mr. Gordon."

"How pleasant. I do love a reconciliation."

"Ah, but there will be a penance with this."

"H'm. Tell me the penance. Then I will decide whether I have committed the sin or not."

"You can't deny it, even with all your ingenuity. Where have you been for two weeks past?"

"Why, here. In Rome."

"See, you have confessed it already. Did you undertake to show me Rome, or did you not?"

"I don't know; but I would gladly show you all the kingdoms of the earth. As for Rome, there it is." He waved his hand over the city with an imperial gesture.

"Then I am to suppose that you did n't find me a responsive listener, that all girls from Chicago are bores, and that you are going to break your deliberate promise?"

"Did you really suppose all that?" said Gordon, with sympathetic interest.

"What else could I suppose?"

"Well, now, the truth is that I stayed away for very shame."

"Shame? Why? I don't understand."

"I don't think you take my mission with regard to you half seriously enough. I was expected to get you married. I can't do it. And the very thought of you, much more the sight of you, fills me with humiliation."

"Dear, dear," said Priscilla. "That's very depressing for me. Perhaps you'd like to get out."

"No," Gordon answered, with resignation. "No, a little mortification is good for me."

There was a subtle pleasure for both of them in the intimacy of this badinage. For a few moments they said nothing. The carriage rolled on heavily, and they watched the stream of humanity drift by. Before Gordon knew it, they were passing the Countess Markovski. Her carriage, horses, and liveries were black as a cardinal's, and she made a striking figure, sitting alone, with the black robes and cushions about her, dressed in black also, but wrapped in heavy, rich white furs. Gordon raised his hat, feeling uncomfortable that she should see him driving with Priscilla.

"Who was the lady, if I may ask?" inquired the latter.

"The Countess Markovski," was the brief answer. Then, continuing in the train of thought thus suggested, Gordon said, "Really, I have done my best to get Edgar to come and see you, but he won't."

"Do you know," Priscilla answered, with a hint of mischief, "it is, well, I may say, a new experience, to have everybody trying to drag a young man after one." Gordon raised his hand beseechingly. "That is just what it is, you know. But I think I might get quite interested.

Would n't it be fun to enchant Orson, to arouse his young affections, bring him to one's feet, and then " —

" And then " — echoed Gordon, with a certain irritated curiosity.

" And then marry him, of course, and become a multi-millionairess, and a leader of Boston society? Would n't it be fun now?"

" That is a matter of " — Gordon began, but changing his tone, " Certainly it would be fun. By all means, do it. You can't imagine how it would relieve my conscience."

" Of course, if it would relieve your conscience — but do you really think I could do it?"

" I've no doubt you could do it," was the enthusiastic answer.

" Very well, then, I don't care to try. If you said I could n't do it, I might be tempted. I should do it for poor papa's sake though, much sooner than for yours. You can't think what heroic efforts he has made in behalf of friendship. He has tried early and late to catch Mr. Payne. I don't think he has succeeded but once, and then he came home boiling. As for getting Edgar to come and see us, it seems to be out of the question. Flattering, is n't it? I suppose he thinks I shall eat him up. And the letters papa writes to Mr. Payne at home — I have n't seen them, but mamma says the ingenuity of them is something " —

" Ingenuity," interrupted Gordon, with a groan.

"What do you suppose my letters are on the same subject?"

"Well, let us talk about something else," Priscilla said.

So, for a little while, they talked about nothing. They had just turned into the western portion of the drive and were passing slowly along the great stretch of wall which separates the Pincian from the Villa Borghese. Long bars of pale pink cloud crossed the sky above. In front of them hung the leaden dome, immense, eternal, as it almost seemed.

"That reminds me of your penance," said Priscilla thoughtfully.

"Ah, yes, the penance," groaned Gordon. "I get it from everybody."

"You must resume your duties as cicerone tomorrow morning and take mamma and me to the Sistine Chapel. I have saved it especially, because I believe you are to convert me to Michael Angelo. I don't like him."

"Poor Michael! If he resembles most other great artists, his one desire was to please young and pretty women. And they always get the old ones and the college professors instead. That is the seamy side of glory. True glory is the flattery of pretty women. The rest is vanity and advertising."

"Well, will you go with us?"

"Will I go? And do my best to bring Edgar too."

Priscilla put the name aside with a petulant gesture.

So they drove homeward among the returning throng. As they passed, many stopped to gaze at them, and many envied him, and not a few also envied her; for they were as charming a pair to look at as one would see in a summer's day. And the greatest charm of all was that they looked thoroughly happy.

The next morning Gordon presented himself, about ten o'clock, to fulfill his engagement. It was a bright, clear day, but as cold as Rome ever is.

"I can't go freezing around in galleries this weather," said Mrs. Stanton. "The fire is too comfortable to leave. I'm going to drive with your father after luncheon. Go by yourselves. Why should n't you?"

Priscilla was perfectly willing, and Gordon did not see that it was his place to offer any objection. So they drove off together in the chilly morning air, Priscilla trying to get warmed up under the thick robes, Gordon now and then saying a word or two, as they passed some curious building or some odd-looking figure.

"Ah!" Priscilla murmured, with a sigh of satisfaction, when they swept out from the narrow streets into the vast, sunlit Piazza di San Pietro. There was not a cloud in the intense blue sky, not a breath of air shook the foam of the fountain as it soared upward. The immense colonnade spread out

its clasping arms to receive them, the obelisk towering slight and stately in the centre.

"St. Peter's is the very embodiment of the Catholic Church," Gordon said. "Ugly, earthy, brooding over humanity like a colossal nightmare; but seizing the imagination by its mere immensity."

Leaving the carriage at the great bronze gate, they passed the Swiss, whose uniform touched Priscilla by its picturesque hideousness, and climbed slowly the vast Scala Regia. The light in the Sistine Chapel was as good as possible; and one could even imagine one found one's way through the murky dilapidation of "The Last Judgment."

"Now, convert me," began Priscilla, with the air of a person who will not be converted, never.

"Oh, come!" Gordon answered. "You don't want to sit right back like that. I'm not a Michael-Angelo maniac myself. The good Michael was one of those supreme, but inarticulate geniuses, like Beethoven, who always make you feel that they have a great deal more to say, if they could only say it. That irritates some people, who prefer that an artist should give his message complete, with divine placidity, even if it is a rather little one — say Mozart, say Raphael. Well, what have you seen of Michael's hitherto? Those three very ugly and laborious old ladies, who are so industriously engaged in sweat-shop tailoring, usually labeled 'The Three Fates'? I give them to you. Do what you like with them. And David? He is a muscular

phenomenon certainly. Has he any of the fugitive grace, the faunlike youthfulness, touched with a divine inspiration of power, which belong to the character? He is a coal-heaver, who would have downed Goliath at close hugs every time."

"But it seems to me that I shall have to convert you," said Priscilla.

"Not at all, not at all. I am only expressing your sentiments. Then there are the monuments in the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo — Night, for instance. She is striking and impressive, certainly; but, after all, it is the long, heavy, ungainly figure of a middle-aged woman, prostrated by a weary lethargy of sleep. What poet ever imagined Night like that? Night is a creature of shadowy, immortal, and ideal lightness, as she speeds over the eastern heaven, in the quick-crowding throng of summer stars, with the moon on her forehead, and the wand of poppies in her hand. Night is not heavy, dull, and sleep-stricken herself; she is swift, delicate, full of grace and mystery, showering dreams about her, and unnamed odors, and indistinguishable murmurs, in a vague unrest. Ah, Botticelli should have painted Night." Gordon delivered this rhapsody in a low, even tone, looking curiously at his companion all the while. When he had finished, he added, with a more commonplace expression: "Well, do you think I understand your feeling about Michael now?"

"Really, you go quite beyond me," Priscilla

answered : " but why did you bring me here to tell me this ? "

" Now, then," was the quick reply, " don't bother with ' The Last Judgment,' which, as Malvolio would say, ' is as dark as ignorance, and ignorance is as dark as Hell ;' but just come over here and look at Adam, as long as your neck will stand it. If Adam does n't reveal his creator to you, I can't."

So he left her for ten minutes to look at Adam, while he himself dallied a little with the Sibyls and Prophets. When she had finished and came towards him, he said : " There, now let us go and wander in St. Peter's for a little. When you have digested Adam, you can come again. But he converted you, did n't he ? "

" Yes," she said, " he converted me."

" Ah, I thought he would," with a contented smile. " Why was n't I engaged to tutor you instead of the other ? "

They made their way back down the Scala Regia and out into the piazza. Priscilla wondered somewhat at having been given such a very brief lesson. Her companion divined the feeling. " You don't see why I let you go so soon, do you ? I have learned by long experience that with pictures, as with other things, it is better to leave the table while one is still hungry. And then, with these conversions, you know, the best way is to drop one little seed and let it work silently. And then, I did n't feel like

the Sistine Chapel to-day myself and I did feel like St. Peter's. Are these reasons?"

"They are. The latter especially. But I did n't require them. When I take a guide, I give myself up to him."

"If only others would imitate your trusting disposition," was the fervent reply.

Inside the great church there was the same quiet, the same vast solitude as always. Gordon led his companion slowly up the south aisle. Here and there they passed the bowed back of a peasant woman telling her beads, or a priest, blue-cheeked from the shaving of his heavy beard, low-browed and muscular. The great marble slabs echoed under their feet.

"I'm sure I don't know why, but I love this church better than any in the world," said Gordon. "When I came back to Rome, it was the first place I wanted to see. It is perfectly absurd to feel so, I am well aware. The building is ugly, rococo, anything you please. There is no design in it — or too many designs. But it is large, that is it, large, large enough to hold me. Not many churches will do that."

"No?" said Priscilla quietly. "I should have thought" —

"Oh, yes, make fun of me, of course. I expected it. But most churches cramp me, cut me off from air and life and sunlight. This seems a world of itself, apart from the other world, yet calm and

warm and sunny. Excuse me for talking seriously. I don't do it often. I don't often think seriously."

"Then you are paying me a great compliment." She spoke with that peculiar air of simple comprehension, of open serenity, which Gordon found so comfortable, there is no other word for it. "Do you know, there is something about you very much like the church," he said.

"Ah! another compliment. But I don't want to make you feel too serious."

"No, no, you can't do that. You make me feel just quiet, and very, very comfortable. Things have been annoying me lately and I don't often let them do so."

They were silent again, and continued wandering idly about, now turning into a side chapel, itself larger than many a home church, now gazing up into the soaring vastness of the dome, now gazing down into the dim sanctity of the crypt. They stood for a long time near the statue of St. Peter, Jupiter that was, watching the osculations of his time-worn toe. First there came a stout contadina, with stolid, brown face, and silver coins jingling about her head; then a lady, fashionably dressed in the very deepest mourning, who raised her long veil slowly and dropped it afterwards with a passionate sob; then a girl, twelve years old, perhaps, who lifted her little baby sister up to kiss the foot and laughed when the child shrank from the cold bronze.

"How the smirking misses in our Unitarian Sunday-schools at home would laugh at this," said Gordon.

"Some of them, perhaps," Priscilla assented. "For my part, I should rather like to perform the ceremony myself; yet, when I think of some of the others" —

Gordon laughed. "The Catholic Church is the only true democracy; and the aristocracy of refined taste which we are developing in America is the most snobbish and exclusive of all. It is because so many people have kissed that toe that you want to do it, and yet you don't want to for precisely the same reason."

It was long after noon, long after luncheon time, when Priscilla got back to the hotel; and as soon as she was quiet and had a chance to think, she wondered why it was that sight-seeing had assumed a new freshness and charm since she came to Rome. Yes, it was certainly a great thing to have a guide like Mr. Gordon, who had n't learned it all out of books, but just gave you his own feelings and experiences. "Gordon." It was a very pretty name. Then she fell to wondering where he might take her next.

As for Gordon himself, the morning had been delightful. But why should she, even in fun, suggest the possibility of such a thing as marrying Edgar, after all? If it were possible, it would be a solution of his own difficulties. He certainly would

do all he could to help it on. And yet — and yet — it would be such an awful shame ! That he himself was getting to care about Priscilla in any special way, did not occur to him even now, which proves, I think, that he was not of an analytical disposition.

CHAPTER XV

THE SONG OF THE SIREN

AFTER such a delightful morning, Gordon could not make up his mind to do anything disagreeable in the afternoon. He would certainly speak to Edgar the next day and have it out with him.

In the evening, as he was sitting in his room with his pipe and a book, there was a knock at the door, and Edgar entered. He looked unusually cheerful, so much so that Gordon feared the Countess had already smiled upon him to a dangerous extent.

"Hullo, Gordy!" he said. "Have n't seen much of you lately, old man. Thought I'd come in and have a puff with you."

"That's right," replied Gordon, as cordially as possible. "Sit down and make yourself at home."

The invitation was accepted, and the two smoked away for a few minutes in silence. Gordon was thinking. Was it best to refer to the Countess at all? Finally he spoke. "At the Countess's this afternoon, as usual, I suppose?"

"Yes, I was there, but she was out as usual. I say, Gordy, women are queer ducks, are n't they?"

"It is generally agreed that they are — by men,"

Gordon assented. Then he went on thinking. What did it mean? Was Edgar getting discouraged? Did this unusual cheerfulness imply disgust at the wily ways of women and satisfaction at an escape? Had Antonia changed her mind and given up her grip? Had she? It was very improbable. He would like much to find out.

He tried to find out in various ways, and with a certain ingenuity; but Edgar, though continuing most amiable, absolutely refused to discuss the subject. He would and did talk of the Stantons, of Mrs. Barton's last reception, of the stock market and his own ventures therein, and of his father; but as to the Countess Markovski he would utter never a word. Gordon at length gave it up, and listened in silence to an elaborate scheme for making a neat little thing by the Rosabella lead mine, in which Edgar was thinking of embarking all the capital he could muster. The general impression left on the tutor's mind was, however, that the Countess's influence was decidedly on the decline. In view of this, he was willing to doze gently, while lead, lead, lead murmured in his ears, and a fair vision of blue eyes and light hair wreathed itself poetically among the clouds of smoke.

What would he have said, if he could have perused the little note which, received by Edgar late that afternoon, accounted for his extraordinary amiability and sociability, and which he read and re-read before he went to sleep, with an ardor

almost as enthusiastic as he would have bestowed on the ticker in a panic? "Dear Friend," it said, "such an unhappy fatality has prevented your finding me at home lately, that I begin to be afraid you may think I am intentionally avoiding you. Do not believe it. I never run away from my enemies, certainly not from my friends, and I begin to count you among the latter. May I? If so, come to-morrow afternoon and take a good long drive with me, not in the Park, but way out in the wide Campagna, where we can be alone together and talk. I will look for you by three o'clock. Will you come?"

Would he come! Would he buy Sugar Preferred when it was twenty-five points off? Why, this was just what he had been waiting for. Abstinence had made him deliciously hungry for those confiding eyes and that suave and subtle flattery which he had not met in a woman before. Would he come!

He came. He was a few minutes early, but the Countess was expecting him in her drawing-room. She rang for the carriage, and gave Edgar the pleasure of throwing her furred cloak around her. For just two seconds she allowed his arms to remain about her neck. Then she drew away, turned, and looked him in the eyes for two seconds longer. As he followed her down the stairs, she laughed and jested, and seemed altogether in a wonderfully light and merry mood. "Is n't it fun," she said, "our starting off together this way, just like two

children out of school. I have been so bored lately with business affairs and family affairs — that's why you have n't seen anything of me. But now it's all over, and I'm free to amuse myself just as I please, and I should like to throw something up in the air; only there's an old Englishwoman over the way, whom I'm always scandalizing. Do I scandalize you?" she added, turning sharply, as he was helping her into the carriage. Then, seeing him glance towards the sedate footman standing beside them, "Italian, both he and the coachman. They can't understand a word we say."

When they had settled themselves comfortably among the black cushions and were driving off, she still chattered. "Oh, I know, I am talking to-day. You have n't said a word yet. But you shall. I am like a bottle of champagne just opened; the foam and froth fly every way at first. Let me settle a moment, and then you may taste me quietly, if you will."

He looked as if a very little taste would unsettle his senses forever. What was there so bewitching about her? He did not care to investigate the problem, but just leaned back and gazed and listened.

"Yes," she went on, "you think I am a child. And I am — and always shall be, till my gray hairs are brought with sorrow to the grave. When anything frets me, I cry. When anything tickles me, I laugh. When nothing tickles me, I laugh — if I feel like laughing. It seems to me as if life had

two masks — one hideous, ugly, and full of horror, one full of endless, ceaseless mirth, meaningless mirth, it may be. Who cares? Which is the real face of life? Is it either? What is life, anyway?"

She turned sharp and short on her companion, who was not prepared with a reply, and had probably never considered the question.

"You don't know," she resumed. "Neither do I. Life to me is instinctive movement, flowing, shifting, changing, the lines of sorrow melting imperceptibly into joy, and those of joy as quickly shifting back. To be still is death. To stop and think is death. To be anything but one's self of the moment is death. And yet one has to pretend and calculate and simulate — do you wish me to do all these things for you?"

Edgar made no attempt to answer. He was perfectly content to sit and look at the quick, mobile face, which seemed the exact embodiment of the view of life she was expressing, and which the cold air was tinting with a delicate glow.

"I bore you," she said. "I bore myself too. Sometimes I think I am not quite right here." She tapped her forehead.

They were both silent for a while. Their route had been at first through the blank and characterless new quarter of the city, Via Buoncompagni, Via Polia, by the Porta Pia, into an even more blank and cheerless region beyond. But as they passed through the dull, flat, modern buildings,

and came into the more open country towards Sant' Agnese, the loveliest of landscapes broke upon them. It was a mild afternoon for the season, clear, bright, and windless. Near at hand, the fields were broken by the plough, rough, brown, the moisture gleaming in the western light. A little further came a rich purple, lying heavy in the hollows among the barren sweeps of the Campagna. Beyond that, a deep, dark blue marked the lower slopes of the Apennines. And above all rose the snowy peaks, glorious with sunlight, cut sharp against the azure of the sky.

"Oh, this is beautiful, is n't it?" the Countess cried, sitting up and gazing with the natural frankness of all her emotions.

"How? What?" said Edgar, staring about him. "I don't see anything. More tombs and ruins, I suppose."

"Not a ruin just at present," was the caustic answer; and with it went a little curl of the upper lip, which Edgar missed in his effort to seize the proper object of admiration. "I was enjoying nature," the Countess went on; "that is one of the freaks of childishness that remain in me."

"Oh, nature. Well, I'm not much on nature, never was. I've seen all I want of it out west."

"To be sure. It is only the sophisticated who like landscapes and made dishes."

Then, as they came up to Sant' Agnese, she said: "You know we were speaking of Catacombs

the other day. There are some here. Let us have a look at them. Perhaps they will please you better than sunlight and white mountains."

"I don't care much for either. But I'll do what you do." Indeed, the humorous lady had already stopped the carriage and was descending, with little regard to whether he cared for Catacombs or not.

She made her way noiselessly into the old church, followed by Edgar's clumsy and shambling figure. Without stopping to look at the frescoes, or even giving a thought to the Basilica, with its mosaics, she went to the entrance of the Catacombs and found the old priest, garrulous, as usual, in broken English, his hands full of serpentine wax tapers. Then they made their way down into the narrow passages, smoky chapels, dim, earthy, cavernous cells, leaving the glory of the winter afternoon far, far behind them.

"Ah, I like these contrasts," whispered the Countess to Edgar.

"Do you? I don't."

She laughed a little silvery laugh, which echoed dully in the earthen passages, like water flowing far away, and made the old priest turn round and give her a queer glance; but without noticing him, she said to Edgar: "You know the blessed saints used to wander through here and kneel in these little chapels and pray and tremble, when the tormentors were speeding after them. These are their bones." She crossed herself with a deep solemnity,

which appeased the old priest, and may have been real and may not.

"Oh, hang the blessed saints!" said Edgar, in a rather nervous undertone. "Did you ever hear of a saint like John P. Morgan?"

"No," agreed the Countess thoughtfully; "I never did."

"Well, then," continued the irreverent youth, "let's get out of here and let their bones rot. I've no use for 'em."

But the Countess changed her manner and stopped tormenting him. Taking him by the arm, she slipped along quietly after the guide, who had dropped his tedious narrative, somewhat disturbed by his visitors' indifference. "Ah!" she sighed, "but this is a tranquil region, tranquil, and calm with the oblivion of centuries. Don't you think there would be a pleasure in wandering here with one you loved, just alone with love, that one thing great and firm and solid in an endless realm of fleeting shadows? And you would whisper those little keen whispers which drop like sparks of fire on the cold, salt ocean of the world. And the harsh echoes of the upper life would be shut away. But then you don't love any one — and all this sounds a little impractical, does n't it?"

Then she drew her arm away, and it almost seemed to his poor, tangled, unromantic apprehension that some spirit of the place had been murmuring in his ear. But the old priest, unable to

contain himself any longer, began to mumble vague legends of a misty past, and the Countess, impatient, cut short the excursion and made her way back to the church.

"Well," she inquired, as the carriage drove off, "how do you like the Catacombs?" looking at him with as coolly practical an air as if she had asked him how he liked the soup.

"I liked what you said to me," he whispered. "Say it again."

"I am not like history," she answered, with a cold, clear, indifferent laugh. "And how very rude you were to the blessed saints. But now don't you appreciate the winter air and the sunshine and the snow-mountains?" As Edgar involuntarily drew a long breath, she added, "I thought so. The little visit really paid, did n't it?"

They were driving down the hill, where the road falls off beyond Sant' Agnese to the Teverino and crosses it by the Ponte Nomentano. Far away to the north, Soracte rose clear and solemn, with its crown of snow.

But after looking about her for a moment, the Countess dismissed the subject of nature and turned to more personal matters. "Well, is the day named yet?" she asked.

Edgar's brows contracted more than usual, as he said crossly: "Don't begin on that. Have n't I told you before that that wax doll is nothing to me?"

"Really?"

"Yes, really, and you know it. What do you suppose I come riding and running after you for, if I care anything about her?"

Without making a direct response to this the Countess smiled and said: "Do you know who does care about her?"

"No, and I don't want to." But there was a bit of curiosity in the tone. We can give just a half-glance to see who picks up even an old wax doll, when we have thrown it away. Perhaps we should rather prefer that no one picked it up at all.

"Oh, yes, you do. It is amusing, I think, that your tutor should step in and snap up the tidbit that was meant for you."

"My tutor? Gordy?" Edgar was quite awake now. "Nonsense! You don't mean it."

"Have you seen the two together?"

"No."

"Then you ought. I met them driving — all alone. Oh, this American innocence! — in the Pincian the other afternoon. If you could have seen her look at him."

"Say, that's a little too much, you know. Of all the impudent rascals" —

"You don't approve, then?" the Countess asked, with delicious soberness of interrogation, as if the subtlety of the American mind was beyond her.

"Approve, no! Why, that Gordon, he's nothing but a beggar living on my father's charity. He never had a dollar in his life."

"But for a wax doll?"

"Oh, well, yes, what do I care? But I do just the same. I'll put a spoke in his wheel. What 'll the old man say? Both the old men? To try to come sneaking into my shoes, just because I won't wear 'em myself! Huh!"

"Mr. Gordon seems to be a very seductive person," suggested the Countess, with an air of deep musing.

"Seductive! You may say so. What makes the women run after him the way they do? I'm shot if I can see. He never did anything in his life. But he wags his tongue, and says smart things, and pours on oil by the dipperful—and then he'll talk you down behind your back."

"Does he talk me down?" Antonia inquired indifferently, with the air of being merely interested in a bright-eyed peasant girl, who was holding up some figs to sell.

Edgar reflected a moment. "Don't know as he does. He does n't mention you except when I do." Then he reflected a little longer. "That's queer too, come to think of it."

"Because everybody else does run me down, don't they? Come now, child, speak the truth. What do you hear people say about me?"

"Oh, not much anyway," Edgar began, embarrassed to an extent altogether unusual with him. "I know lies when I hear them well enough."

"Then you do hear lies about me, do you?"

Such as what?" Her manner was a bit dry, a bit cold.

"Well, they say you are the most fascinating woman in Rome."

"And that is a lie? Oh, my friend, how comforting you are." She laughed; but the laugh was hard too.

"I say, don't be so sharp, you know." Then, irritation restoring his natural bluntness, "Why should I tell you what they say, when you know as well as I do? They say there never was any Count Markovski, they say you have had — a good many lovers, they say you never loved any one yourself. What do we care what they say?" He made a desperate effort to take her hand under the thick robe. But she drew away from him.

"Listen to me," she replied, in the same cold, balanced voice. "Of course this is all lies, with a certain admixture of truth, such as there is in all lies that are worth telling. With regard to any attractive woman there are only three classes of men: those who have been in love with her, those who are in love with her, and those who would be in love with her if they dared. The first abuse her from — gratitude, the second from jealousy, the third from a general feeling that the grapes are sour. As to women, there is only one class, and they abuse her from the word go. It makes no difference what she does. Is she reserved? She is haughty. Is she frank? She is bold. Is she

modest? She is cunning. Is she gay? She is wanton. Does she come to grief? It is her own fault. She brought it on herself."

There was a moment's silence. The slant light of the descending sun spread a purple splendor on the eastern hills. Nothing was to be heard but the even tramp of the horse's feet. Edgar made another effort to possess himself of the hand and succeeded. Perhaps its owner was scarcely aware of the fact; for she seemed to be absorbed in thought.

When she spoke again, her voice was gentler, and her speech ran on in a smooth, quiet, almost monotonous current: "My friend, I should like you to know the real truth about myself and about my life. That was why I brought you out here to-day into the desert, where we can be alone. Do you care to listen?"

A warmer pressure of her hand was all the response that was required.

"Very well," she went on. "The story is simple enough, and common enough, and dreary enough, as most life stories are. I am a vagrant and a wanderer, without family or friends, or any one who cares whether I am alive or dead. I have a home, to be sure, a sort of one, a strange old castle far away in Poland, which my husband left me; but it is more dreary even than Rome, even than I. I will never go there again, if I can help it. You look a little relieved to hear that I had a hus-

band. Oh, yes, I know people do not believe it. They have disputed about his existence as they do about the existence of the Deity — and to as little purpose. He was rather a nonentity in my life, but he did exist, — *quoique si peu*. I bore you, don't I?"

"Not much! I'd rather hear you — and see you — than a variety show." The hand was pressed again — and responded a little.

"You are so good to me," she said, a phrase which has probably tickled as many masculine vanities as any other since the world began. "Well — to resume. My father was a Polish gentleman — poor, like all his nation. My mother was an Englishwoman; but she died when I was five years old, and I hardly remember her. After her death, I lived in the country with an old aunt, who did little but scold the servants and pray to the saints. How weary I got of both! My life during those years was blank — yes, blanker than it is now. Then, when I was seventeen, my father sold me — that is the real word — to my late husband. But I was contented enough. I would have married the devil to escape from where I was. To be sure, I was not much better off. But at least, in my new home, I could scold the servants myself. And my husband was good to me, petted and made much of me, had me taught so many things which I am glad to know. Then he died."

She was silent again. They had turned about

now and were facing towards the city. The sun was just reaching the horizon. The air was clear and quiet. The carriage moved steadily.

"Well?" said Edgar, at length, "you've just begun, you know."

"Yes," she answered, "I have just begun, yet what more is there worth telling. I was young, I was not unpleasant to look at, I knew no more of life than a child, and oh, I was hungry and thirsty for it. I wanted to live, to use the new strength of my soul now that I was free, to live, to enjoy, to drain the rose-red cup of the beauty of the world. I have drained it — and it is bitter, bitter, bitter. I trusted women — and half of them laughed at me, the other half caressed me — and betrayed me. I want no more of women. I trusted men. Who would think it? Yet they deserved it better than the women. But I trust no one any more — no one. Not you, any more than the others" — this in response to a reproachful pressure of the hand — "not you, any more than the others." But she smiled gently and sadly as she said it, with the smile that flatters a man into thinking he may yet be the great exception.

Then, after another moment's silence, she added, "So, when they tell you stories of me, you may believe what you like. I have not been a saint, I do not pretend it. I have had no one to help me, no one to advise me, or restrain me. But in all my wanderings I have sought just one thing —

love, love, love, such as we read about in books. I have found out that it exists in books only."

"Antonia," her companion began, with such passion as he was capable of, "Antonia, I" —

But she raised her finger and hushed him gently. "No, no, child," she said, "don't be foolish. You don't love me. I forbid you to. If you will let me be an older sister to you and will come to me and tell me your secrets, perhaps I can help you and comfort you sometimes. I have talked to you thus much about myself, because I thought your friends — Heaven save them — would do what they could to keep you away from me. And I want you — I want you. Why can't they leave me any one to love in peace?"

"Confound it!" Edgar burst out. "Who will keep me from you? Let 'em try. There's no woman like you in the world. I hate women just as much as you do. They're all dolls and puppets, silly chatter, and clothes, and throwing away money on nonsense. But you're different. Antonia — Antonia" —

He continued to pour forth incoherent protestations, in the ecstasy of his new-found passion. But he said no word about marriage. Seeing this, she gradually quieted him, until, by the time they had reached her door, he had wandered off somehow into an elaborate description of the doings of the Boston Exchange.

CHAPTER XVI

A TUTORED SAVAGE

THE Countess Antonia Markovski was certainly as wise as the serpent, though any similarity to the dove might have been difficult to trace in her. She could hardly have devised a narrative more adapted to persuade and fascinate Edgar Payne than the vague and brief one with which she had favored him. If she had asserted herself to be an injured innocent, he would have despised her and gone on his way. She had asserted nothing of the kind. She had denied no one of the numerous stories which she knew he might have heard about her. Only, she had represented everything as being her misfortune not her fault. It was men, those dreadful men, who had done all the mischief. Deceived, imposed upon, betrayed, deserted, she sought refuge at last in his truth, and manliness, and devotion. In other words, she kept all the charm of her misdeeds for herself, and threw the guilt of them upon other people. In so doing, she appealed to that most subtle and colossal element of masculine vanity, which sometimes goes by the name of chivalry.

Needless to say she was completely successful. Edgar returned to his lodgings in a state of amor-

ous intoxication ; and as he was eating his solitary dinner in a cheap café, he seasoned the dubious viands with infinite brooding on each detail of Antonia's speech, with the vague charm of some fleeting gesture, the turn of her head, the lifting of her finger. He had never seen such a woman. He had never troubled himself much with women anyway. They were creatures created to spend money, and so, obviously dangerous to those whose object was to make it. But this one was different. She might spend money. Oh, yes, she probably would. But Edgar had no real dislike to spending money, if only he could see the equivalent. Besides, he was quickly developing a superstition—so fertile is Eros in disguises—that his future, his success was bound up in Antonia. Stock-gamblers, like other gamblers, incline inordinately to such ideas. She would be his mascotte, his lucky-piece, his rabbit-paw. He pictured to himself long evenings when he and she together would study the mystical financial column, and she, with a blind, unerring instinct, would bid him buy this and sell that, and hold on hard, when others were scared and letting go. She would be such a star in the social world also. He did not care much for success in that line ; but failure annoyed him, as it does every one. Those swells, who had sniffed at him when he was at school, Gordon and his kind—they would n't sniff when he had a woman with such style as that to keep his house.

It was marriage, then, that he was thinking of, was it? H'm! H'm! Marriage? And his father? His father would certainly have given millions to have seen him married to Priscilla Stanton. But would he disgorge so readily when it was a question of a Polish Countess, who had been unfortunate and owned a ruin somewhere at the end of the world? It was very doubtful. And love in a cottage, or in the aforesaid Polish ruin, or in a South End flat, with four rooms and a general housework girl — To be sure, the Countess appeared to be living well at present; but even Edgar knew enough to mistrust such appearances as that. It was very possible that the late Markovski had left his money to his own relatives, in case of a second marriage. And there were other possibilities.

No, it was best not to be too hasty. He would make love to the lady as assiduously as in him lay, but he would not mention marriage yet.

Thus thinking, the immense desire to be communicative, so peculiar to lovers and murderers, impelled him to drop into Gordon's room and have a chat. He found the latter, as the evening before, sitting comfortably with his pipe and his novel; and remembering the evening before, the tutor was disposed to receive Edgar rather cordially, having dismissed matrimonial anxieties, to some extent, from his mind.

"Well, how's lead?" he began, as Edgar, also

provided with a pipe, sprawled his ungainly length on the forlorn sofa, which concentrated all the discomfort of the uncomfortable room.

"Lead be hanged!" was the cheerful answer. Then, after wriggling in vain annoyance for a few moments, the young man added, "Oh, I say, this sofa's too bad," and established himself, pipe and all, on the bed. "Lead!" he continued. "I had a cable to-day. Rosabella's busted. Somebody's got left. Glad it ain't me."

Gordon puffed along at his leisure. In a few minutes he tried again. "Had a pleasant afternoon?" he ventured.

This was the chance Edgar had been waiting for. Most of us need very little excuse for talking about ourselves; but almost all of us want some. "Great!" he replied. "The Countess Markovski took me to drive in the Campagna."

"The deuce she did! Boo!"

"Yes, she did. Why should n't she? Don't you wish she'd take you?"

Gordon answered nothing, but looked at the ceiling. He was thinking. His pipe went out.

Edgar continued, with insolent defiance in every tone of his voice: "You want to have 'em all to yourself, don't you? And you think you can. By Jove, you may, most of 'em. I don't want any of the pie. But when there comes along a woman like that, with life in her and fire in her — Oh, Gordy, would n't she take the Avenue, though?"

How would you like to sit in a box at the Hollis Street with her? I believe she'd make money too. They've got an awful eye to business, that kind of women."

"You think she's in love with you?" Gordon asked, with the mildest air of interrogation.

"Confound you! You think no woman would ever be in love with me, don't you?" Then, exasperated by Gordon's apologetic gesture, he went on. "You think I'm ugly. So I am. And awkward. So I am. And clumsy — no manners — no style, breeding, as you call it. So I am. But I tell you, it is n't the fine airs that do the trick. What a woman that is a woman likes nowadays is a man that gets there. And I am a man that gets there." In spite of the absurd egotism of the words, something in his tone suggested that, after all, perhaps he was.

Gordon still sat calm, looking almost as if he were thinking of something else. At length he began very quietly: "Edgar, it is just as well for us to talk this matter over a little. I haven't said anything hitherto because I didn't suppose it would do any good. I don't suppose it will now."

"Not a bit."

"No, probably not. But I shall say it all the same. Your father put you in my charge, and I am responsible for your conduct, so far as my influence will go."

"It is n't far," Edgar murmured.

But Gordon went on, without paying any attention. "Your father is a man of the world. He would be the last person to object to your meeting all sorts of people in all sorts of places. A man has got to do that kind of thing. But when it comes to an intimate association with— with such a woman as the Countess Antonia Markovski" —

"What about the Countess Antonia Markovski?" shouted Edgar, sitting upright, and letting his pipe also go out, in his enthusiasm. "What about her? Tell me that. Oh, you fellers that run down everything you can't afford to buy yourselves! I've seen so many of 'em on the street. Come up and buttonhole you in a corner — 'Say, Payne, you are n't going into that Dunstable and Baxter Electric, are you? It's the meanest thing you ever struck in your life. There ain't a dollar behind it, not a dollar. The General Electric is down on 'em. The legislature's down on 'em. The Railroad Commissioners are down on 'em. You'll lose every cent you put in it.' By Jove! When some fellers talk to me like that, I hustle and scrape up everything I can and dump it all into the Dunstable and Baxter Electric, the first chance I get."

"Your wisdom is beyond your years," was Gordon's peaceful comment. He had lighted his pipe again. "I hope you'll grow to it. And I'm sure the analogy between the fair Antonia and an electric road is brilliant and striking. But just let me

say my say. You're not obliged to follow my advice, you know."

"I know it well enough. Talk away. I can think about something else." Edgar, too, relit his pipe, and tried to appear as if he were thinking of something else; but his sudden and irascible jerks from one position to another made it evident where his attention was.

Gordon spoke slowly, weighing his words; and though he was calm enough in appearance, any one who observed him closely might have seen that he was not comfortable. "I have been in Rome before and I have seen the Countess Markovski before — in other places. She is an adventuress of the very worst order, because she is at least half sincere in what she does. I could tell you the names of the men whose lives she has wrecked — some by drinking, some by gambling, some by their own pistol bullets and some by others'. She does not care. She is absolutely reckless. She is simply ignorant of what the word conscience means. She will put you on and wear you and take you off and crumple you up and throw you away and forget you, like an old glove. She" —

He had been speaking faster and with increasing passion up to this point. Then he pulled himself in suddenly and hesitated. Before he could resume, Edgar interrupted him, but with a calmness which rather astonished Gordon. "That'll do, Gordy, you know. You've done it mighty

well, almost as if you 'd been jilted yourself, hey? If I did n't know there was nothing but milk and water to you, I might be jealous, old boy. But I see right through it all. Such an awful put-up job. So easy to find a pack of lies like that, when a man has any use for 'em. And what should you say if she 'd told me all about herself already, a good deal more than you 've done? Hey? I'm no chicken, you know, neither is she."

"She's told you all about herself, has she? Did she tell you" — then Gordon drew in again and changed his tone — "Well, in that case, you can hardly need any warning from me. I don't deny that she's a better authority than I am and could tell you things — Never mind. Now this is all over, suppose you leave me to my pipe and my novel. It's extremely entertaining. There's a clever woman in it who makes a fool of two men."

Edgar got off the bed and stood up; but he was n't going quite yet — Oh, no! "That's all right," he said, standing beside Gordon, with his hands in his pockets and something between a grin and a frown on his amiable features, — "that's all right. But there's another story to the thing. How about that Stanton girl, hey?"

Gordon looked up, with more annoyance than he had yet shown; but he controlled it. "I don't see that Miss Stanton has anything to do with this affair at all."

“Oh, but she has, though.” Edgar turned towards the door. “I know your little game.”

“Little game?” Gordon repeated, really puzzled this time.

“Why, of course. Want her yourself, hey? The Miss with millions? But you won’t get her, Gordy. Oh, no! I’ll put a spoke in your wheel for that. What a trick to play on the poor old man at home! When he sent you out here on purpose to get the rocks for me and have ’em in the family, just to grab the chance to make big money for yourself. Oh, the clever boy! He’s above such things as money. He won’t go on the stock market! Oh, no! That is n’t big enough for him; but when about five millions comes along, done up in hide, he’ll put it in his pocket. Yes, indeed. It’s pretty, but what’ll old Stanton say when I tell him? Oh, my! I” —

“Get out!” cried Gordon, who had just found his tongue. “Get out! Or” —

Edgar got out, his pleasant face more wrinkled than usual at his pleasant jesting.

Gordon, when he was alone, forgot his anger at once; but he dropped his novel and puffed away rather vigorously at his pipe, looking up at the ceiling, with one leg thrown over the arm of his chair. Of all the confounded messes into which a destiny, hitherto rather considerate than otherwise, had led him, this was certainly the worst. Why had he ever become acquainted with Mr. Payne senior, or

ever painted the portrait of his frigid, rigid sister ? What was he doing in this galley, or rather why had he made himself a galley-slave for nothing ? He marry Priscilla Stanton ? He ?

Then, as he took several prolonged whiffs and blew the smoke into the already lurid atmosphere, it occurred to him that that was just what he should like to do. It was not her money. Of course her money would be pleasant. He was old enough not to be a fool. He had no contempt for money and no objection to marrying it, though he did not think he would marry for it. Certainly, he would not have married the Countess Markovski for double Priscilla's millions. But in this case, it was no question of money. It was the girl herself. She was so restful. That was the word for her, over and over again — restful. He was not aware that he needed rest particularly — had not been aware of it, until he met her. But suddenly he seemed to need it immensely. And in the haze of smoke he saw the blue day at Hadrian's Villa and himself sitting at her feet with her voice sounding softly in his ears.

At length, he shook himself into reality. He had eight generations of Puritan conscience at his back ; and on the first view, this did not seem a sort of thing that could be done. There are a number of his countrymen like him : with an immense modern imagination to suggest all possible sins, and a quaint, mediæval reluctance to commit any of

them. He was under trust in this matter, as Edgar said. Father Payne had sent him out there to secure this girl and her millions for the family; and how should it be possible for him calmly to walk off with her himself? He might not be able to bring about the match that was proposed; but at least, after all suitable endeavor in that direction, he could fold up his tents and retire with dignity.

Then he rose, refilled his pipe, and paced the room slowly, backwards and forwards. After all, the whole thing was only one of Edgar's insane imaginations. So far as he was concerned, the idea was pleasant, uncommonly pleasant. It was astonishing how pleasant it appeared, now that it was impossible. But Priscilla herself had never thought of him, that was certain; and she never would. There are men who expect all women to fall in love with them. There are others who are always astonished at such a result, even when it occurs rather frequently. And women often fall in love with this latter sort; as, indeed, they do with the others also. But Gordon, as I hope the reader is aware, had no very great opinion of himself, thought very little of himself in any connection; and it did not strike him as possible that a young lady from Chicago, with so many millions, should condescend to look his way, unless on the trifling occasion of a picnic or something of that nature. Nevertheless, considering his own feelings, as now rendered manifest by Edgar's blundering allusion, it would

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certainly be wiser to keep away from the Stantons, it would be wiser to keep away — it would be wiser — that is, of course, so far as courtesy would permit. All of a sudden, it seemed to him that courtesy would demand that he should see them a great deal more than he had done hitherto. Well, in that case, perhaps it would be better that he should be a little discourteous.

Then his mind reverted to the rest of his talk with Edgar. Had he accomplished anything? It had all been extremely unpleasant for himself at any rate, and he would be shot if he would attempt any further and more personal revelations. After all, perhaps it would not be necessary. He had noticed that Edgar had said no word about marriage, while, of course, he himself had carefully avoided referring to anything of the kind. It might be that the hints he had dropped would bear fruit in time, especially if he said nothing more.

Then he smiled, as always, at the thought of presuming to do battle with such a subtle foe as the Countess. And the smile broadened, as he thought of her describing her past to Edgar. How he would have liked to hear that story!

As he put out his light and turned over to sleep, he smiled again, this time at the oddness of the complication in his feeling for Priscilla. The smile was a more amiable one than the other; but there was a bit of pain with it, for various reasons.

CHAPTER XVII

A BIT OF SHADOW

FOR some little time Gordon did nothing further in regard to Edgar; but on the whole he felt encouraged. The two saw almost nothing of each other, and it was possible that Edgar was seeing a good deal of the Countess. He never mentioned her, however, on the occasions when he did meet his tutor; and the latter, believing any delay to be a gain, and thinking it probable that he should hear something of a marriage before such a thing was definitely arranged, began to cherish a faint hope that his words had made some slight impression, after all.

So far as the Stantons were concerned, he tried to stick to his resolutions, and was amazed to find how hard it was to do so. It was altogether too dismal passing the evenings alone at home. The thought of Priscilla in her pleasant parlor would keep coming. Then he tried going out, Mrs. Barton's, and his various Roman acquaintance, tried loafing in Morris's and other studios. He amused himself and amused others; it was born in him, and he could not help it. Still, it was surprising how the image of Priscilla haunted him through all his gayety.

The Stantons did not help him very much either. He met Mr. Stanton at the bank, and was invited to dinner. He met the ladies at Mrs. Barton's, and was invited to dinner. It became clear that courtesy required that he should go to dinner. So he went. It was very, very pleasant. Yet there was no one there but the family, and uncle Edwin, and Mr. Parsons, who quoted Shelley without ceasing, and took occasion to mention that wealth was vulgar and war outgrown. After dinner, however, Gordon and Priscilla got a little apart, and chatted vaguely and quietly of everything and nothing. Then, when Mr. Parsons had gone to quote Shelley elsewhere, Priscilla seated Gordon at the piano and made him sing the latest songs from home, which he did with his usual drollery, to the huge amusement of Mr. Stanton. That gentleman was neither so old nor so rich as not to be touched by reminiscences of a dance-hall and a variety show; while the curious delicacy of the performance made it charming to Mrs. Stanton and Priscilla, whose feminine recollections were naturally of a less precise and vivid character.

Yes, it was all very, very pleasant; and it ended in a promise to drive with Priscilla on the first fine day to the Protestant Cemetery and visit the graves of Keats and Shelley. As Gordon walked home he sighed to think of the extreme inefficacy of human will when pitted against human weakness.

The next day was rainy, chilly, and hateful, and the day after. The day following that, the sky

cleared, the wind got into the south, and the air had the touch of spring that comes at Rome even in the middle of December. Gordon presented himself at the Stantons' at half-past two, as agreed upon; and while he was waiting for Priscilla to get ready, he chatted with Mrs. Stanton. Why did she not come with them, he urged. Well, she was expecting friends that afternoon, and could n't. The truth was she thought Priscilla would rather go alone, and she was a model American mother. Not that she would have let her daughter go about with an undesirable young man. Not for a moment. But Mrs. Stanton liked Gordon. For the last year the possibility of Edgar Payne had hung over her like a nightmare; and now she felt that Gordon had, somehow or other, saved her from that possibility, and she was kindly disposed to him in consequence. Of course, she was mistaken; but then almost all our good fortune comes as a reward for something we have n't done, does n't it? Then, she knew that Mr. Stanton also had taken to Gordon greatly. So Priscilla was allowed to go alone and enjoy herself.

In a few minutes she appeared, in a long brown coat, with her hands in her pockets, after the approved modern fashion, a huge brown hat with brown feathers overshadowing her eyes and forehead. "Come!" she said. "Come! I have been shut up in the house reading novels for two days, till my eyes ache. Oh, how I want to get out of doors!" And out of doors they went.

They drove through the Via dell Tritone, Piazza Colonna, and the Corso, all alive with vehicles, and noisy as only Italy is noisy. Priscilla was infinitely gay, and Gordon also ; and they called each other's attention to this, that, and the other oddity, making unkind observations in a kindly spirit, and so harmonizing mirth and charity, to do which is the highest philosophy of life. Then they threaded the crooked streets at the foot of the Capitol and made their way over toward the Tiber, and past the Temple of Vesta, seeming always a monument of solitude, in the heart of the crowded city. Under the west slope of the Aventine and along the barren Via della Marmorata they drove more rapidly.

"Let us climb Monte Testaccio first," said Gordon. He saw that the excursion would be over much too quickly, and that it depended on him to devise sleights for lingering and lingering it out.

"Very well," Priscilla agreed. "Let us climb anything."

They drove to the foot of the singular agglomeration of broken pottery which seems to have served the orderly, or disorderly, ancients as a general rubbish heap. It is a sharp, steep walk to the top, though only a few steps, and Priscilla's cheeks glowed under her brown hat.

"Why did they — put it here?" she asked, looking about her with a pretty little gasp for breath.

"Human egotism prompts the suggestion that it

was made for me to climb — with you. But there may have been other reasons.”

The near view from Testaccio is not charming, consisting of stone-yards at the foot of the slope, and broad, straight, barren streets a little further off. Nevertheless, one sees, a little further still, the slopes of the Aventine, with domes and spires peeping over them, off to the east the strange, symbolic pyramid of Cestius, with its line of gloomy cypresses, and, furthest of all, the Alban Mountains, with their crown of snow.

The tranquil blessedness of the afternoon sunlight made it all very lovely to Priscilla, after her two days of rain and novels. She turned slowly about, so as to sweep the whole horizon, and then said in a thoughtful tone: “Thank you very much for bringing me here.”

“Thank you,” said Gordon, in reply. That was all.

Then they ran down the slope again, like two children out for a holiday. In a few minutes, the carriage brought them to the main object of their excursion, the Protestant Cemetery. Like everything else in Italy, this cemetery was evidently designed with a view to summer and scorching heat. In the intensity of an August midday, when the birds are asleep and the cicada is cutting the blue air with his keen cry, the shadow of the vast cypresses is touched with dreamy repose. There could be no fitter resting place for poets, whose

souls were full of love and sunshine. But in the dead of winter there is something chill and bitter there. The weak sun of December barely pierces the cypresses at all. Even on bright days, the damp does not dry from the gravestones and the paths are green and slippery with moisture. It seems as if the passionate heart of Shelley must be numb with frost, where it rests forever under the cold shade.

"Oh," said Priscilla, "let us come away from here. I don't like it."

Gordon, in default of Mr. Parsons, tried in vain to make her listen to the last stanzas of "Adonais." "No," she said, "no, no! Poets must live in sunlight and die in sunlight. This is no place for them here."

The grave of Keats touched her more nearly. Lying, as it does, without the formal precincts of the cemetery, it escapes, to some extent, the gloom which overshadows the rest. Even then, in mid-December, a rose was blooming in the little inclosure, and the slant sunlight fell softly on the stone with its pathetic inscription: "Here lieth one whose name was writ in water."

Priscilla read the words gently, almost to herself.

"Yet he was a great poet," Gordon said, "one of England's very greatest. Within a convenient time after his death, the world found it out, and much good it did him. He died of the thirst for

glory, and glory came upon him, and he never knew it."

"Perhaps he knows it now," Priscilla suggested, gently still.

"Perhaps."

"Do you think so?"

"I don't know, I'm sure.

'What Adonais is why fear we to become?'

It is the best thing that has ever been uttered about immortality, because it is so perfectly illogical."

When they were settled in the carriage again, Gordon said: "Surely we are not going home yet. The afternoon is n't half over."

"Surely not, if you don't wish it. You are my guide to Rome, as I told you long ago."

"Well, then, let us drive up to San Pietro in Montorio and see the view and the sunset. It is all in Baedeker, to be sure; but there are some things that even Baedeker does n't spoil."

They drove back again along the Via della Marmorata and the bank of the river, crossed the bridge of Santa Maria del Sole, and made their way through the narrow streets of Trastevere to the foot of the Janiculum.

As they went, they chatted idly.

"It seems odd somehow that we should meet over here and get so well acquainted, after never having heard of each other at home," Priscilla remarked.

"Yes, it does seem odd. But then everything seems odd to me. I walk through life like a man through a shop full of jacks-in-the-box. At every step something curious flies up and hits me in the face. Yet there are people who find life monotonous. I think I must have an imbecile but happy tendency to surprisability."

"Don't you get tired of yourself sometimes?"

"Never. I find myself inexhaustibly interesting. Sometimes I get tired of other people. You see I can calculate a little on what I am going to do myself, and then it is always amusing to find myself not doing it. With other people I can't even calculate."

"Do you make resolutions and then break them?"

"I did when I was younger. I have learned better now."

"Not to break them?"

"Not to make them. But see here," Gordon went on, laughing, "why are we talking about me? Talking about one's self to a—charming woman is the most seductive of occupations; but after a certain age one learns to refrain from it."

"Is n't that a resolution?"

"A broken one, if you like." Then he turned and looked at his companion. "Now about you," he said.

"Oh," answered Priscilla, looking at him steadily, but without a touch of coquetry, "a woman does n't talk. She listens."

"That is n't the common opinion." Then he added, after a moment's reflection: "but it's the true one. The man does nine tenths of the talking. Then he finds fault with the woman because she won't let him do the other tenth. But I've done my nine tenths now. Talk."

"That sounds just as if you were holding the great brass ear of a graphophone or a reporter up in front of me. What shall I say?"

"Anything. Who is your favorite poet? What is the color of your parlor furniture? How many times have you been in love?"

"Shelley. Red. Never."

"Heavens! You take my breath away. How exact and precise you are! Your conversation lacks atmosphere."

"But for the graphophone?" she suggested mischievously.

"And as to the matter of love," he went on, taking no notice, "it can't be true. One always hovers, you know, before one lights."

"I think there are some who never hover." She was more serious now.

"And there are some who never light. It is true. But those are the exceptions. One should make it the aim of one's life not to be an exception in anything."

"I suppose men always — hover." She was still serious and spoke slowly, gazing off into the distance.

"I don't know," he answered, thoughtfully also. "I have — hovered. I am tired of it and ready to light now." Then, changing his tone: "There we are talking about me again. Wonderful how attractive the subject is; but let us get out and look at the view instead."

They had reached the little platform or terrace in front of San Pietro in Montorio, and certainly the view was as attractive as any subject could be. It is, of course, complementary to that from the Pincian, but far vaster and more varied. And at that hour the light was such as to show it in perfection. The air, moistened by the warm south wind, was full of a rich, soft haze; and the low sun gleaming through it poured a delicate golden radiance over the hundred domes and towers spread out at their feet. The eye turned from the Aventine to the Palatine; rested on the vast, low bulk of the Colosseum, cut sharp against the purple hills; passed over the Capitol and the Quirinal and all the churches of the mediæval city, noting here an obelisk and there the square roof of a palace-fortress. Further still, it caught the keen points of Soracte piercing the blue, and in the nearer foreground, the yellow symmetry of the Mole of Hadrian. Still further to the west, rose Monte Mario, crowned with its villas and gardens, and further yet again, the dome of St. Peter's, the dome only, hanging huge, clear, and quiet in the golden light.

"It is beautiful," was Priscilla's simple comment.

"Yes," said Gordon. "It is beautiful, spiritually beautiful. There are a thousand views at home, in New England, infinitely more beautiful in themselves; for, after all, this is bleak and barren in winter and parched and barren in summer. What makes the beauty here is the tread of human feet and the touch of human hands. Romulus, and Horatius, and Marius, and Cæsar, and Cicero, and Brutus, who were such a bore at school, get their revenge here. They say St. Peter was martyred on this spot, and I suppose it might have been here as well as anywhere else. What is certain is, that myriads of weary pilgrims have climbed up hither, to gaze at the haven of their hopes. It touches us, because we are men too and pilgrims too."

"Pilgrims in search of what?" asked his companion, with soberness.

"Ah, I do not know. Did they?"

They lingered for a few moments longer. Then, at Gordon's suggestion, they turned and went into the church. It is a quiet little church, not much visited even by those who come to the place for the sake of the view without.

"I like the Catholic churches, especially these out-of-the-way ones, more and more," said Priscilla. "There is a calm about them which does not seem to be anywhere else in the world."

"Did you visit the Certosa at Florence?" Gordon asked.

"Ah, yes, that little garden in the midst of the cloisters, that was more peaceful even than a church, just like a corner cut right out of the blue heaven over it."

"I should be glad to pass my life there, meditating and raising vegetables," Gordon added thoughtfully. "Only I should n't. It is odd how many things we at the same time wish and don't wish."

They walked slowly about the cold and silent building, peering up at the dim altar-pieces in the chapels, mostly done by pupils, after the greater masters. Everything had the touch of mediocrity which belongs to many objects in Rome, mediocrity relieved by an atmosphere of moss-grown dignity, not native to the things themselves. Our travelers were loath to leave the place. There was an intimate calm about it which seemed to bring them nearer to each other than even the natural joy of the outer world.

At length Gordon bestirred himself. It was too intimate, too calm, to be compatible with the attitude he had decided to adopt. "If we stay longer here, we shall lose the sunset," he said.

Priscilla would have preferred to stay, but she could not well refuse to go; and in a few minutes they were driving along the great open sweep of the *Passeggiata Margherita*. The view to the westward from this new promenade offers a beautiful contrast to that in the opposite direction over

the city. Here are no ruins, no palaces, no churches, with their cold gray domes; but villas surrounded with groves and gardens, and great rolling curves of hill and valley, at that moment full of cavernous depth of shadow, overshot with shafts of sunlight. The sky was clear and quiet, deep blue, pale blue, golden. The cypresses on the horizon stood out against the gold background, sharp and stately.

"Let us get out and sit here for a few moments," Gordon suggested. But, instead of sitting, they went and leaned over the western parapet, and it seemed as if they were voyagers setting out into that golden sea. For a few moments they gazed in silence. Then, with the fatal instinct of love, which makes the universe play accompaniments to its own passionate duo, they began to speak of themselves, softly, absently, with tones full of the golden light; not directly either, but through the medium of things apparently indifferent.

"You have n't said a word to-day about your — what shall I say — intended?" Gordon began.

"Whom do you mean?" Priscilla answered slowly.

"Ah, she feigns ignorance — she is a coquette." As Priscilla took no notice of this, he went on: "Are n't you sorry for all the trouble you have caused me?"

"No," she said, still looking away into the sky.

"Then you ought to be. Don't you know that if it were n't for you the wedding bells would be ringing merrily? Don't you know that just because of you they may soon be ringing for somebody else?"

Priscilla deserted the sky, and, still leaning on the parapet, looked from under the rim of the brown hat into her companion's eyes. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"What I say."

"Who is to be married? To whom?"

"Well, the cards are not out yet; but it appears that the young man whom you — jilted, so unkindly, consoles himself with a foreign lady of distinction."

"Who?" There was a grain of sharpness in the question. Priscilla did not want Edgar, just as Edgar did not want Priscilla; yet neither was quite pleased to have the other turn to some one else. Just as Antonia, for her part, was extremely displeased at seeing Gordon at Priscilla's feet. It was an odd twist of purple threads in the tangled skein of love. "Who?" she said.

Gordon let his eyes rest on hers for a second and then, in his turn, took refuge in the sunset. "The Countess Markovski," he answered.

"Markovski, Markovski — where have I heard the name? Oh, yes, I was introduced to her the other evening at Mrs. Barton's. I did n't like her."

"That is unfortunate. And we met her driving on the Pincian one afternoon. Do you remember?"

Priscilla nodded. "A Countess," she said musingly. "But will she be a Countess? The Countess Edgar Payne?"

"Well, not exactly. Just plain Mrs. Edgar Payne, I should say."

"Plain — but she is handsome, very handsome — if you like that kind. And is she rich?" Gordon shook his head dubiously and Priscilla went on. "Poor Mr. Payne! Poor papa! Poor Countess!"

"Why don't you say 'Poor Mr. Gordon?'" He turned to look at her, with a mixture of mischief and irritation. "Why don't you? I'm sure you ought. It's awfully hard on me, you know. I get everything so nicely arranged and then you go back on me. Well, you did," as she shook her head. "Then there comes up this other complication; and what am I to do? You're bound to help me so far, I think."

Priscilla did not answer for a moment, but looked once more steadily at the west. The sun had already passed behind the hills. "Can't you buy the lady off?" she said, with the cold insolence of virtue. "They always do in novels."

"This isn't a novel. No, I think not." He spoke a little shortly; for he suddenly remembered that he had loved this woman with whose name virtue was so ready to play football.

Priscilla, struck by his tone, gave him a quick and searching glance. "Do you know the Countess Markovski?" she asked.

"Yes, I know her — that is" — He left the sentence incomplete and turned away.

"Then I should go to her," was the young lady's haughty comment. "I should think she was the one to help you, if any one. I am so chilly. Supposing we start."

She was chilly, a little, Gordon thought; and they started. That day the Countess Markovski's name was no more named between them. The chill wore off, however, in a few minutes, and Priscilla got to speaking softly and happily of home and home ways and how glad she should be to get back to them. As they drove again through the crowded Roman streets, in the pleasant blending of twilight and moonlight, Gordon found once more the sense of infinite restfulness which charmed him in Priscilla's society. All the Edgars and Countesses in the wide world troubled him not.

Once in his own room, however, he realized that he had added another to the long and cheerful string of broken resolutions. It is true, he still thought that Priscilla cared nothing for him — he thought not; but, even for his own part, the sweetness was getting a little too sweet. Still, he would make no more resolutions.

CHAPTER XVIII

A DUEL

THE Countess Antonia had a great desire to see Miss Stanton. She had, indeed, been introduced to her at Mrs. Barton's; but it was only a glance, a nod, and an eighth or a sixteenth of a smile. She wanted to talk with her alone, to watch her, in short, to fight one of those little duels in which some women use their claws with purring politeness. She had no especial object in view, except the gratification of her curiosity. The suggestion made to Edgar, that Gordon proposed to marry Priscilla if he could, had been merely a casual invention of spitefulness. It might very well be true; but she hardly expected to ascertain the truth of it during a morning call. If it were true, she did not know that she would meddle in the matter. She hated Priscilla instinctively; but perhaps there would be no better way of gratifying her hatred than to let a man marry the girl for her money. If Gordon were married and rich, and she herself were married and rich, they might meet again in the American antipodes, after all.

But though she wished to call on Priscilla, she had no particular desire to call on Mrs. Stanton.

Through her maid, who was perfectly at home in such matters, she ascertained that it was Mrs. Stanton's custom to spend every Monday with an invalid friend who occupied a villa beyond the Porta Pia. As for Mr. Stanton, he invariably passed the afternoon out, either driving, or visiting, or reading the papers at Piale's. Antonia made her arrangements accordingly.

The Monday after Priscilla's drive with Gordon, which had taken place on a Friday, was a dull, damp, miserable day. A light, misty rain fell at times; but for the most part there was nothing but fog, thick, drifting, opening up for a few minutes and then settling down again, so that one could hardly pursue ordinary indoor avocations without a light. Priscilla was idle and out of sorts. She had not been herself since Friday. The thought of the Countess Markovski disturbed her a little. There had certainly been something odd in Gordon's tone when he referred to that lady. What did it mean? Priscilla no longer concealed from herself the fact that Gordon interested her very much. When she told him that she had never been in love, she told him the exact truth, so far as the perfect tense was concerned. If he had asked her whether she was in love, her answer would, of course, have been exactly the same; but perhaps she could not have given it with quite so clear a conscience. Not that she was ready to use the word love even to herself. She would have preferred to

have him use it for her. But she was coming to feel that his company was pleasanter than any other company, his voice more caressing than any other voice, his hand strong and sweet, with a new strength and a new sweetness. Now, just as she was ready to admit this openly, there came up an indefinable black shadow of a disagreeable black Countess, who put tones into that caressing voice which she, Priscilla Stanton, did not wish to hear there. It was tiresome. Priscilla was not a tragedy heroine. She was simply a demure, discreet, sensible, American girl. Some people would have called her cold. Nevertheless, I think I would rather have had her love than that of the Countess Markovski. Above all, when she wanted a thing, she wanted it with the most commendable tenacity.

So on this particular day she was a bit blue and a bit cross. Having a good deal of self-control, she did not make her state of mind very apparent. Her mother, indeed, observed it ; but as she had already a dim inkling of the cause, and had been at one time a demure, discreet, sensible, American girl herself, she let her daughter alone, so far as possible.

Priscilla was grateful for this, and was still more grateful for the absolute solitude which came after luncheon, when her mother betook herself to the invalid friend, and her father also had disappeared, as usual. Yet, strange to say, no sooner were they gone than she found that absolute solitude was not quite what she wanted. She took up a book — a

good, serious book, in order to prove to herself that she might be more bored than she was. It did not answer. She went to the piano and tried to play a sonata of Beethoven. But she found that the stupid noise of the instrument interfered with her hearing the approach of any visitor. Besides, she wanted to be near the window. Some one might be coming to see her this dull afternoon. What visitor? Who might be coming? Really, she thought she was growing absolutely imbecile.

Then some one did come. Uncle Edwin, on his way to a four-o'clock concert, stopped in to see his relatives for a few moments. Priscilla was very fond of uncle Edwin, and always treated him with a great courtesy which was delightful to behold. Just at present she did not know whether she was glad to see him or not; but she would give him the benefit of the doubt.

"Well, Priscilla," he said, leaning back in an easy-chair, crossing his legs, and folding his hands for a little chat. "Have they left you all alone?"

"Yes, uncle Edwin, and I'm desperately blue."

"Oh, at your age you don't know what blueness is. Yours is only a little paler shade of rose than usual."

"No, it's blue, blue, blue. I don't believe old people know how to be blue."

"Well, perhaps gray is more the color for us. But what's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter." As she said it she

peered out of the window into the deepening mist, and drummed on the sill with her fingers. Then, realizing that she was not being very civil, she apologized. "I'm rude," she said, "and not making myself entertaining. Yet I'm really glad to see you, uncle Edwin. Now tell me all the news from home. Anybody married or anything?"

Uncle Edwin thereupon retailed the contents of his latest letters, with facts as to the whole generation of Stantons dead and living; but it was not tedious, and Priscilla did not find it so; for there was love through it all and a bright thread of gentle humor. When there was a lull, however, it occurred to her that she might get some information that would be still more interesting; so she changed the subject. "Uncle Edwin," she began, with the air of making small-talk, "do you know the Countess Markovski?"

Now I have mentioned elsewhere that the Countess was rather a friend of uncle Edwin's. He would allow no one to abuse her in his presence and was always ready with ingenious defense and denial when any one tried to do so. Nevertheless, he felt, and was rather surprised and annoyed to find that he felt, a decided reluctance to have his niece Priscilla know the Countess Markovski, or even mention her name. He showed his annoyance by crossing his legs the other way and rubbing his hands together a little nervously; and Priscilla observed it. "Yes, I know her," he said, "do you?"

"Not at all. That is — I met her at Mrs. Barton's the other evening. She interested me. She is so — distinguished looking, you know."

"Yes, she is distinguished looking." Uncle Edwin fidgeted again and appeared as if he would prefer to drop the subject, which, of course, made Priscilla, not at present in the mood to spare anybody, all the more anxious to continue it.

She did not quite know how to do this. So she made a plunge. "People say she is rather — rather — not quite" —

This was too much for uncle Edwin. It was his business to stand up for a friend, no matter what the circumstances might be. He unclasped his hands, placed one on the arm of the chair, and with the other rubbed his chin restlessly, at the same time tilting his suspended foot. "People say very unkind things," he burst out, "and they don't know why they say them. I have been acquainted with the Countess Markovski for some years and I consider her a lady. It is very different over here from what it is at home, where everybody knows everybody and everybody's grandfather. This cosmopolitan life shifts like the sea. People come up like bubbles. You see them for a while. Then they are gone again. You don't know where they have gone to, any more than where they come from. You have to take them for just what they are, nothing more. The Countess Markovski is eccentric and very indiscreet, I dare say; but she is generous, and full

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of noble and kind impulses. As for the stories people tell about her" — Then he remembered that he was talking to a young girl, stopped, and was going to change the subject — awkwardly, when the servant brought Priscilla a card.

"Countess Antonia Markovski — Oh, yes, show her in at once."

Uncle Edwin was dismayed. "Talk of the devil, etc.," was the first thought that occurred to him. But what was he to do?

"Well, well, well!" said Priscilla under her breath. "Is n't this fun?"

Then the Countess glided into the room. She wore her usual black, relieved this time by a bit of yellow in the heavy black hat. "My dear young lady," she said to Priscilla, with her gentlest and most insinuating manner, "I ventured to call on your mother and you, because I have taken a great fancy to you both. It is inexcusably unconventional, is n't it?" Then she shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly, as if to say, "What will you have? I can do nothing with my fancies."

Priscilla murmured something vague in appreciation of the compliment, and the dark lady turned to uncle Edwin. The attitudes of the two as they shook hands, she looking down on him, with the slightest inclination of her graceful figure, he bent and bowed in all possible angles, yet so dignified with it all, were a delightful picture. "Ah, Mr. Stanton," she said, "I have n't seen you for so

long! Now that your country has become great and imperial and world-subduing, you have forgotten your old sympathies and poor little Poland."

"No," he answered, "I don't like world-subduing. You know me well enough for that."

They had all seated themselves, the Countess on a sofa near Mr. Stanton, Priscilla on the other side, a little further off. Uncle Edwin took the main burden of the talk, as was natural enough; and Priscilla watched. The Countess was charming certainly, with that perpetual, sinuous grace of all her movements. It was easy to see how she fascinated uncle Edwin — and others.

The conversation turned on music, apropos of Mr. Stanton's concert. "It is to be chamber music, quartettes," he said, "Mozart and Schumann. But here in Rome I like the church music better; although, to tell the truth, I hear less music in Italy than in any other country and less in Rome than in any other city of Italy."

"Ah, you are so fond of our church," observed the Countess. "Do you know, Miss Stanton, I think your uncle will certainly end by becoming a Catholic?"

"We often tell him so," Priscilla agreed.

"No, no," was the half-humorous answer; "I have too many Catholic friends to become a Catholic myself."

"Mr. Stanton, that is not courteous."

"Well, but you know, every mystery loses its

charm when you see it too much from the inside. Yet I love the Catholic Church. It is *the* Church. All the others are mere branches and offshoots."

"Why not enter it, then?"

"I can't take my beliefs ready made, Countess. The Church believes in authority; I don't."

"But you must have some authority — the Bible perhaps?"

"No, Countess, not even the Bible, though I love it more than the Church."

"Ah, it is reason, then, your authority? You are a rationalist?"

"What have I done that you should bait me thus with theology? I like the rationalists less than the Catholics. My authority is within. I feel my belief — I feel it — feel it in my bones."

The Countess gave a little shrug of self-pity and smiled at Priscilla. "This is — what do you call it? — Transcendentalism. It is above me. Let us talk of people. That I can understand." Then she asked Mr. Stanton various questions about his friends, whom she had met at different times, about distinguished American personages, political or other. Her memory in these matters, which certainly could not have interested her, was wonderful; and more wonderful still, the tact and delicacy with which she avoided any harsh, bitter, or satirical remark, soothing and caressing the old man's sympathies at every word. Priscilla, who by this time had learned her uncle's peculiarities, appreci-

ated this and was astonished. The woman might be an adventuress, but she was clever, more than clever. It was no wonder Gordon was interested in her, — if indeed he was.

Uncle Edwin soon grew fidgety, however. The time for his concert was rapidly approaching. Should he go and leave his niece unprotected? What would her mother say to him? Yet at that moment it appeared to him that the concert was the one thing he wanted to hear in the world. He had been a bachelor for nearly eighty years; and though he was the most affectionate of men, he did not love little sacrifices, nor make them. So he went — with a reluctance which was perfectly evident to both the women and perfectly understood by both, and which amused them both not a little.

“Dear Mr. Stanton is very fond of your society,” said the Countess softly, when the door had closed behind him.

“Of yours, I think,” replied Priscilla, as softly.

Then they talked of the weather for a few moments. Each was gauging the other.

At length the Countess said what she had come to say, but more softly and politely than ever, and as if she were speaking of the weather still. “I am told we are to congratulate you on your approaching marriage, Miss Stanton?”

It was a piece of supreme insolence and Priscilla knew it; but she kept her countenance and her temper. Who was this woman that she should

quarrel with her? "Ah! and whom am I to marry?" she asked calmly.

The Countess played confusion with easy grace. "I beg a thousand pardons," she stammered. "I surely heard the name of Mr. Edgar Payne" —

Then Priscilla hit back without gloves. "That is odd. Do you know, I had heard he was going to marry you?"

Antonia took the blow and respected her opponent for it; but she countered. With an air of innocence as natural as nature, and no more so, she replied: "My dear Miss Stanton, is n't that curious. But you have been altogether misinformed. Mr. Payne seems to like my poor residence. Perhaps he enjoys the ease and freedom of it. But — in short, I assure you — you know people will talk" —

"Yes, I have found it so myself," Priscilla quietly assented.

Decidedly this was to be no easy victory and the Countess felt it; but she went on in the same tone: "Some one must have misinformed you purposely, I think. So many people have an interest to injure a solitary woman like myself."

Then Priscilla made a mistake. When one has a candid disposition and happens to be in love for the first time, one is woefully hampered in contests of this nature. "I had my information from a very reliable source," she said.

Antonia smiled, a brief little gleam of a wicked

smile, and Priscilla could have bitten her tongue out. "Ah, yes," said the dark lady, "I see where the shot came from. Naturally, Mr. Gordon has an interest in this matter, and I know no one who can have more the appearance of being a reliable source of information than he, — when he chooses."

Priscilla's pride was breaking now. Why was this creature allowed to torture her? But she would fight it out a little longer. "Mr. Gordon is an old friend of yours, I think?" she asked, with all the coldness she could command.

"Indeed he is. I have known him for years and known him well. Very, very charming, is he not? A little idle, I fear, and not quite genuine — especially with women. There are stories — but there, we must n't gossip, you know." Even she did not dare to turn the screw another hair's breadth; so she resorted to the weather again and kindred topics. In a few minutes she rose and bowed herself out, with the same unfailing grace. "Do remember me to your mother, my dear. I am so sorry to have missed her. Nothing would make me more proud than to see both of you at 24 Via Ludovisi."

Priscilla made little or no response to this. When she was alone, she threw herself down on the sofa, buried her face in the pillows, and wept. She could not really believe that Gordon was in love with this woman. Yet why not? And what could an artless babe like herself do in battle with such a creature?

CHAPTER XIX

EDGAR SPEAKS HIS MIND

MR. STANTON, as well as Priscilla, had taken a fancy to Gordon ; though the father's was, doubtless, of a less ardent nature than the daughter's. Gordon did not always have this luck with men. Women liked him almost invariably, because he almost invariably liked them, and showed it. Men he did not always like ; and he showed that also, even when policy would have suggested to him to conceal it. But Mr. Stanton attracted him with something of Priscilla's restfulness ; and then, Priscilla's father received some attentions which were expected indirectly to reach her. Of course, Mr. Stanton had not yet thought of Gordon as a possible son-in-law ; but he had reached the point where such an idea might be expected to come to him without a shock. He knew, indeed, that Gordon had no money and was not likely to have any ; but he cared as little for wealth as any man ever does who is in possession of it ; and the marriage of millions, as personified in Edgar Payne, had disgusted him sufficiently to make him quite contented with something else.

On the Sunday afternoon just preceding the

Countess's call on Priscilla, Gordon and Mr. Stanton had strolled together for an hour and Gordon had talked over some of his difficulties. It goes without saying that he made no reference to his own acquaintance with the Countess ; but he did explain his anxiety as to Edgar's situation and the possibility of a very undesirable marriage.

"It would be just good enough for the young cub," said the elder gentleman, who did not like to have his daughter slighted, even by the veriest cub in existence. "Just good enough. The woman is an adventuress pure and simple, of course?"

Gordon shrugged his shoulders. "She is handsome — and very clever."

"You could n't buy her off? Surely, a bright woman would rather have ten thousand dollars than such an oaf as that on an uncertainty."

"I don't think so," was Gordon's somewhat hesitating answer. "From what I hear, she is a lady whose whims are more to her than any amount of money. She is not an ordinary personage. Your uncle, Mr. Edwin Stanton, is a sworn ally of hers."

Mr. Stanton used an unquotable word not strictly favorable to his uncle's powers of discrimination. Then he repeated: "Yes, it would be just good enough for the cub himself; but then there is the cub's father. Poor Harrison! After all the hopes he had about Edgar and Priscilla! Bah! The very idea makes me sick. And as clear-sighted a man as Harrison Payne cannot really — no, it is im-

possible. Now that I have seen the boy, I understand better some things his father wrote me that seemed queer at the time. By the way, you've written to Mr. Payne about all this, of course?"

"Well, no," said Gordon apologetically, "I haven't yet. I didn't see what he could possibly do at that distance. Then I hoped it would blow over. And then I was ashamed of myself."

"You've no need to be, by George! I'd sooner run the Northern Pacific Road than take the contract you've got on your hands."

He was a comforting man, Mr. Stanton; and Gordon felt him to be so.

For a few minutes they walked along in silence. At length Mr. Stanton said: "See here, I don't feel as if I'd done the right thing altogether by that boy. I was so disgusted with him at the beginning, so sick, so thoroughly disappointed, that it seemed as if I could n't bear the sight of him. To be sure, it's hard work to get a sight of him; but my heart has n't been in it hitherto. Now I'll make another trial. I'll write him the kindest note I know how and beg him to dine with me. If he comes, I'll have a little talk with him about his Countess and so on."

Gordon shook his head dubiously. He did not think Edgar would go to dinner; and if he did, it was more than likely that Mr. Stanton's eloquence would drive him in the wrong direction. It seemed hardly worth while to mention the last consideration,

however. As to the first, Mr. Stanton recognized the force of it ; but thought he would at least make the attempt. Then Gordon, thanking him for his friendly assistance, went his way. As he was wandering slowly homeward, he remembered Edgar's threat of telling Mr. Stanton his suspicions as to his tutor and Priscilla ; but it did not seem possible that even Edgar's impudence would go so far as that.

When Mr. Stanton reached home, he wrote the following note : " Dear Edgar, — I feel very badly that we should be so near you and see so little of you. When your father and I were your age, hardly a day passed that we were not together. And now that I have a chance to get acquainted with " — he tried hard to write " to love," but the words would n't come — " his son, I do not want to lose the opportunity. Can't you dine with us some evening ? I will say Tuesday ; — but any other evening that suits you will do as well for me. Do come. Affectionately yours, George Stanton."

Edgar perused this friendly epistle with a shrewd grimace. " At the old game again, is he ? By Jove, I'll go there and settle it once for all." So he answered as follows : " Mr. Stanton, Dear Sir, — Having no other engagement on Tuesday, will dine with you on that evening. Yours truly, Edgar Payne."

Mr. Stanton did not show this note to his wife and daughter, but simply announced that Edgar would dine with them. Mrs. Stanton consented to

make the sacrifice under the circumstances, and Priscilla, though she expressed some annoyance, had a certain curiosity to see more of Gordon's pupil and the Countess Markovski's future husband. The Stantons had long since made themselves perfectly at home at the Hotel Bristol, and had their own private dining-room, so that at least they would escape the misery of exhibiting their guest to strangers.

Dinner was supposed to be at seven ; but Mr. Stanton had omitted to mention the fact, and Edgar consequently appeared at a quarter past six. Priscilla was in the drawing-room alone, as her father and mother had come in late and had only just gone to dress. She was somewhat dismayed at the appearance of her visitor, but then she thought, "After all, he can't eat me."

She rose and was going to shake hands ; but he merely nodded, with a curt "how d'ye do," and went and placed himself with his back to the fire. Whereupon Priscilla sat down again.

"What a fine day it has been !" she remarked, anxious to say something safe, if not particularly brilliant.

"Oh, yes, if you like it. I don't care for anything in Rome myself."

Priscilla thought she would let him start the next topic and waited a moment. He did not seem to feel the silence very much ; but at length, after staring at her for a little while, he began : "Say,

that was a neat thing about you and me, was n't it?" He chuckled grotesquely.

"About you and me?" Priscilla answered; and then saw she had made a mistake.

"Sure. Who would it be about? You need n't play shy. You know just as well as I do that my father and your father had it all patched up between 'em, me and you to marry — and say, there would have been money though, would n't there?"

"Would there?" said Priscilla, with demure simplicity. The young man's impudence was so perfect that she was beginning to enjoy it and to think she might amuse herself a little.

Edgar stared at her again, with his eyebrows raised. "I told Gordy they could n't work any such put-up job as that. You may be all right — I'm not saying anything against you. But you are n't my kind."

"How can you be so sure?" It would have taken keener vision than Edgar's to see the fun under the grave eyes that were turned toward his.

"Is she trying to jolly me?" he thought to himself. "Hang it, no." Then he replied aloud, "Oh, I can tell a thing or two. I know the kind of woman I want. I want something with snap and go — something that will make folks look at me, don't you see?"

"I'm afraid I am not like that," said Priscilla sadly, gazing down at her hands folded in her lap.

Edgar was puzzled. It could n't be, it could n't

be that this simple, silly chit was trying to bluff him! Why, not even Antonia was sandy enough for that. He looked at his boots for a moment and frowned. Then he began again. "I came round to-night because I saw your pa could n't tell when he'd got enough, and I thought I'd fix him once for all. See?"

Priscilla was startled out of her equanimity. Her eyes flashed, as she cried: "Do you mean to say" — Then she realized that she was foolish, and that her father was able to take care of himself; so she wilted. "It was very good of you to take all that trouble," she concluded.

Edgar understood less and less; but on the whole he thought she was trying to make fun of him, and his temper got a little unsteady. "Look here," he said, "I don't believe you know what you've lost. I can tell you there are women that do. As for that Gordon, I wish you joy" —

But Mr. and Mrs. Stanton entered; and Priscilla felt that their arrival was very opportune. How she should have met this last attack she could not imagine. Indeed, she was so discomposed at the idea of it, that she excused herself for a few moments and retired to her own apartment to think things over. Had Gordon really confided anything to this intolerable creature? Oh, no! It was quite impossible. But what an intolerable creature he was.

It is, fortunately, not necessary that I should

dwell upon that dinner. A novelist has some characters with whom he lingers just for the simple charm of every word and gesture. It is a pleasure to see them move and hear them speak and to think their thoughts. But there are others whom one exhibits no more than is absolutely necessary; and even that seems sometimes too much.

Mr. Stanton strove with all his might to keep the conversation on general topics. But no matter what the topic was, Edgar managed to give it a certain twist, which kept his auditors perpetually in a state either of exasperation at what had just been said or of fear of what he might say next. When questioned about his father, he made it evident that he regarded that gentleman simply as a magnificent machine for getting money and showering it on his son. The machine was a success and was therefore entitled to respect — that was all. When questioned as to his boyhood, it appeared that he never had had any. When questioned as to his travels, he simply poured forth a flood of vulgar abuse of everything and every person European, which did more credit to his patriotism than to his manners. At last, Mr. Stanton referred to some of his former business experiences, and then he found that he had struck the vein. Edgar's eyes brightened, he began to ask questions on his side, and the problem of talk was solved for the moment. Indeed, his familiarity with the history of the stock market for the last twenty-five years astonished the

elder gentleman, and would have interested him, if it had not been for the painful vulgarity with which it was expressed and the impudence with which his own failures and successes were discussed and criticised.

Such as it was, however, the conversation lasted out the dessert; and then, Edgar having sat quietly by and let Mr. Stanton open the door for the ladies, the two gentlemen found themselves alone with their wine and cigars.

"Pretty good drink!" remarked Edgar. "I can't afford anything like it. What do you have to pay for it?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered Mr. Stanton absently. He was thinking how he should begin his attack. It seemed rather difficult. As for Edgar, he had no wish to speak unless spoken to, and fell to thinking of the Countess.

On the whole, a gradual approach seemed best. "I wish your father were here," the elder gentleman observed at length.

"So don't I," said Edgar, with a slow wink, sticking his thumbs in the sleeves of his waistcoat and tilting back his chair.

"There's nothing I should enjoy more than wandering about Rome with him."

"Huh! There's nothing I should enjoy less."

This did not seem very promising. So Mr. Stanton started in another direction. "Do you think, on the whole," he began rather aimlessly and, as he

himself felt, rather absurdly, "that you are getting much from your trip over here, much profit, you know?"

"What do you mean, profit?"

"Why, I mean, as everybody does, are you learning much, getting much education from these different countries and sights and so on?"

"Hardly," said Edgar. "Do you think I want to be a professor in some mouldy old college? I like to see the pretty women over here; but I can see them at home."

"The pretty women!" Mr. Stanton echoed. Here was his opportunity. He went on, with that amusing mixture of would-be knowingness and solemn reprehension which most older men affect when they talk to young men on such matters. "The pretty women! Now, my dear boy, I have been thinking that I ought to say a word or two to you about that very thing. You know people will talk foolishly sometimes. I understand they are beginning to talk a little about you. Of course, it is n't my business to find any fault. A young man will have his fling. It was so in my own day, too. But you know, I stand, as it were, in your father's place here; and sometimes we don't realize ourselves just how things look to another person outside. It's risky to get one's self mixed up too much with one particular woman. If she is a sharp one, and most women of that class are, one is apt to find one's self in trouble before one knows it. I don't mean to

preach to you, of course ; but it seems as if just a friendly word in the right place — that's all ” —

Edgar had uttered never a sound during this harangue ; but he stared up at the ceiling, chewing the end of his cigar viciously. Now he burst out : “ But it is n't all, though. Now, look here, Stanton, you just listen to me. I can see through you, as plain as through a piece of window glass ; and I want you to understand, once for all, it won't do — it won't do. That daughter of yours is a nice enough girl, I dare say. Looks like a china doll ; but that's nothing to me. Only you just get on to the fact that she don't suit and she won't suit. When you understand that, perhaps you 'll quit insulting other women who are just as good as she is. Oh, if there's anything I do hate, it's these people who put on airs because others ain't good enough for 'em. See ? ”

Mr. Stanton hardly did see. He was too full and overflowing with wrath to see much of anything. “ My daughter ! ” he gasped. “ My daughter ! Young man, I think you'd better go, before I say anything more ! ” He stood up, but he was so shaken by passion that he had to rest his hand on the back of his chair.

“ Who cares what you say ? ” ejaculated Edgar, rising also and moving towards the door. “ Oh, yes, I'll go ; but I'll tell you another thing first. Gordy's going to run off with the bone. Oh, ho ! What do you think of that ? She'll take up with

him, that sanctimonious daughter of yours. I dare say she 'll run away with him. He's a beggar, you know, and always will be. What do you think of that?" So saying, the young man left the room and slammed the door.

Mr. Stanton made his way into the parlor, in a state of mind unusual with him; for he was not a choleric man. When there, he paced irregularly up and down, uttering broken ejaculations, to the utter amazement of Mrs. Stanton and Priscilla; although the latter, considering her own experience before dinner, was less astonished than her mother. "The cub! The insolent, low-bred cub! When I was giving him a piece of friendly advice to go and abuse me like a pickpocket. I insult — My daughter, indeed — my daughter! — Psha! — damnation!" — Then, happening to pass directly in front of Mrs. Stanton, he noticed the expression of blank bewilderment on her face, stopped a moment, and burst out into a hearty peal of natural laughter. Blessed be the broad and happy temper which can find matter for mirth in its own mistakes and mishaps as well as in those of others.

"A piece of true comedy, my dear," he said. "The fellow ought to be on the stage or in a novel. I played myself right into his hands, after all. He thought I was still trying to catch him for that girl there," and he looked fondly towards Priscilla, who, at the moment, was embroidering very busily and kept her eyes close on her work. "If

he thought so, it was natural that he should give me a piece of his mind ; though, as the other fellow said, his language would have been impudent from God Almighty to a black beetle." Then he added more softly and thoughtfully : " He also tried to annoy me by suggesting that Gordon wanted to marry our Pris. I suppose he would lie a little more easily than he would speak the truth. But I like Gordon. He's a gentleman and a straightforward, honorable fellow. And, by George, he deserves a gold mine, after all he's been through with that cub. Well, now I'll go finish my cigar in peace."

When he had left the room, the two ladies were silent for a moment. " Mamma," said Priscilla at length, still keeping her eyes on her work, " did you hear what papa said ? "

" Yes, dear," answered her mother gently.

" Do you agree with him ? "

" Do you ? "

" Yes, mamma."

" Then, my dear, I agree with you."

CHAPTER XX

THE MAGIC OF THE MOON

SINCE his drive with Priscilla, Gordon had reflected more than usual. It seemed that he was always reflecting nowadays, and it bored him. The result of his reflection was, however, a certain modification of his attitude toward the young lady. He still felt that he had no reason at all to suppose that she cared anything for him ; but it was getting very evident that he cared a great deal for her. Under the circumstances what was to be done? Was it necessary that he should give her up, simply because of the peculiar circumstances under which they had met? If he really cared for her and if, by any chance, she was beginning to care for him, would not such a separation be fantastic, Quixotic? It was true, he had been commissioned to see her married to somebody else. But had he not done what he could to bring about such a consummation? Would he not, even now, most gladly give way to Edgar, if such a thing were possible, conceivable even? Was it not absolutely certain that, if he had never come near Priscilla, such a marriage would have been just as much out of the question as it was at present? As he de-

bated this difficulty, in the intervals of debating that other difficulty about Edgar and the Countess Markovski, he smiled again and again at the ludicrousness of it all. Was ever before an idle, profitless young man so tossed and gored on the horns of disagreeable moral dilemmas? But the upshot was the decision that, when he was once out of his present situation, he would address himself to the wooing of Miss Priscilla Stanton, without fear or delay. It was true she was rich and he was poor; but he was quite clear with himself that if he married her, it would not be for her money. Indeed, he thought it more than probable that her father would refuse his money, perhaps even his consent. So much the better. An incentive for work was just what our hero felt that he needed. It was time he did work.

For the present, the thing to do was to get clear of the Payne connection, as speedily as was consistent with doing his best for all parties concerned. Here he gave a few moments' thought to the suggestion, which had disturbed him a little ever since it was made by Priscilla and re-made by her father, as to buying the Countess off. Doubtless, Mr. Payne would gladly give ten thousand dollars, or a hundred thousand dollars, to get Edgar out of such a scrape. Yet, after all, would he? He was a man who did not like to be done. In the present case he would be very apt to be more angry with Edgar than with Antonia, and to

say that he had richly deserved his fate. Moreover, Gordon himself was unable to overcome his repugnance to such bargaining. Antonia might accept a bribe or she might not. In any case, he was not the person to offer it to her. Nor would he. With this decision, he put the question entirely on one side.

He then wrote a letter to Mr. Payne, as Mr. Stanton had suggested, stating the facts in regard to Edgar's present position, explaining the apparent impossibility of the Stanton marriage, and asking for advice and directions. This he did, although conscious that advice and directions from that quarter could hardly arrive in time, if they were really needed. He said not a word about himself and Priscilla, feeling that he could not do so as yet with any justice to her. Meantime was he to avoid her entirely? He did not see why. He had made up his mind as to the future and certainly nothing definite need be said at present. Indeed, he hardly saw how he could avoid her without what must seem like gratuitous discourtesy.

His conclusions on this point were tested, when, on Thursday morning, he received the following note: "Dear Mr. Gordon, — We are going to visit the Colosseum by moonlight this evening and should be very glad to have you continue your Cicero-nian functions, if you feel so disposed. Sincerely yours, Priscilla Stanton." Priscilla had hesitated some time before writing this. She was by no

means anxious to run after Gordon; and it was very clear that hitherto most of the invitations had come from her. On the other hand, he had always been ready to accept them, and, so far as she could tell, he had always enjoyed himself when he did accept them. She was not without a shrewd suspicion of the scruples and reserves which held him back from seeking her society. "He is unwilling to step in between Edgar and me," she thought. "Pooh! As if that were a reason!" So she wrote her note as above. Needless to say that Gordon was more than willing to go.

They left the hotel at half-past eight. Uncle Edwin had joined the party, also Mr. Parsons, who was delighted to visit the Colosseum, or any place where he could talk. Priscilla had insisted on walking both ways, rather to the disgust of Mr. and Mrs. Stanton, who were not much accustomed to that form of locomotion. The young lady greeted Gordon kindly. Nevertheless, she attached herself, on starting, to her father and the two older gentlemen, leaving the younger cavalier to escort her mother's somewhat lagging footsteps. That matter of the Countess was rankling still just a little, and Priscilla hoped to clear her mind of it before the evening was over. Meantime, she did not wish Gordon to think she was too hungry for his society. If she had any idea of making him jealous by such conduct or of troubling him in any way, she did not yet know the man she was dealing

with. He was thoroughly in love with her, and knew he was ; but his disposition did not permit him to take such small matters in dudgeon, especially when such taking would have involved any neglect of gentle courtesy to a lady. So he devoted himself entirely to Mrs. Stanton, lingered long to chat with her by the Fountain of Trevi and the Column of Trajan, which stood out sharp and clear in the moonlight, and did not arrive at the Forum until Mr. Parsons had delivered at least two tirades on the vulgarity of wealth and the obsolescence of war. We may fully acquit Gordon of calculation in the matter ; yet it is certain that Mrs. Stanton liked him better afterwards. What stout mother of fifty is not pleased to have her daughter's young man talk to her for half an hour, without an obvious desire to be somewhere else ?

Then they passed around to the south side of the Forum under the Palatine, where they were themselves in darkness and could look out upon the moonlit scene below them. It was very beautiful. The rough angles and harsh colors of the ruins were softened and mellowed. Vague depths of shadow lay under the crumbling arches ; and the broken columns reflected their uneven heights on the marble pavement. Over opposite, the Basilica of Constantine rose gigantic, filled full of rich light, which gleamed and glittered on the fragments of sculpture scattered over the floor. Uncle Edwin recalled to them all, with a word or two, the tre-

mendous contrast of past and present, the hurrying throngs which had crowded that little space to hear Cicero and to slay Clodius, the idlers who had lingered there in the days of Horace, cheating and gossiping, the strange and motley tumults of the later empire, when a discontented regiment unsettled the fate of the world. And all was quiet now, ruined, absolutely gone, that old Roman fame a plaything for the curiosity and pity of mankind. "In the same way," said Mr. Parsons, "in a thousand years, the native of Sydney or Auckland will travel to inspect the ruins of Washington. But no, because the ruins of Washington will hardly last like these. They were a great people — a great people — a great people — hum — hum — hum." Then, after gazing a moment in silence, he went on: "But for all that, the present is with us — the present is ours and that is enough. Who cries out for the past, or sighs for it, its old customs, its dead aristocracies, its faded religions? I do not. Even the art of the past — let it go. Nothing is good that we do not make for ourselves. If a man wants to be an artist, let him fill himself with life, life, and not go mumbling over the skeletons of another age. That is the trouble with American literature. It is all a pale reproduction of Europe. Longfellow — Whittier — they call that poetry. When a people has such a grand, new, glorious country as ours, they should never look back. The future! The future! All is there."

"Perhaps I am mistaken, Mr. Parsons," said Priscilla, who took some liberties with her friend which he would have resented in a young man; "but I think that the other day I heard you proclaiming the exact opposite."

"Did you? I dare say. I contradict everybody else, and why not myself?"

Then they made their way onwards, passing through the eastern end of the Forum into the Via Sacra, and so, by the Arch of Titus, down the long slope to the Colosseum. Inside the huge building numerous groups of sight-seers, attracted like themselves by the splendor of the night, were scattered about, some here and there in the arena, others dotting the vast circles of the sides with shifting black points. But where a hundred thousand Romans had established themselves comfortably, a few dozen Americans, English, and Germans did not do much to break the solitude. It was indeed a solitude, singularly so in that clear tide of moonlight, which added just the element of mystery necessary for perfect charm. The whole inner surface of the building, where it was flattened into the sloping tiers, was fully illuminated; but this even, shining level was constantly broken by the sharp shadows of projecting fragments, by vague, dim openings, filled with mystery, beginning nowhere and ending in nothing. Now and again a little group of people would plunge into one of these gulfs. Faint sounds of voices and laughter would tinkle in the

darkness. Then the figures would emerge again elsewhere. Overhead glittered, clear and quiet, the sparkling clusters of the winter stars.

Our friends all remained standing, for a time, in the centre of the arena. "Ah," began Priscilla, "I have never before seen anything like this. It seems as if the ghosts of the martyrs were in every one of these shadows."

"Oh, no," laughed Gordon, "only malaria. The spirits of a hundred years ago, or two or three hundred years ago, are all reduced to germs at present. Such is science."

"Science has never really dispelled the mystery of life — or of death — and never can," muttered uncle Edwin, who had all a transcendentalist's horror of nineteenth-century positivism.

"And life — and death — they are at the bottom of all mystery, are n't they?" Mr. Stanton suggested.

"It is at times like this that you have to turn to Shelley," said Mr. Parsons. "Wordsworth for bright summer mornings, when the wind sweeps through sunlit grass, and the white clouds, loaded with sunlight, roll over you. Keats for sunny nooks in autumn, yellow and purple, with the rich flavors of harvest. Byron for storm and the wrath of rains and lightnings. Shelley for the unearthly quiet of moonlight and midnight, soft creeping motions, vague, breathless whispers, infinite depths of elemental suggestion, a musical sob of language that

harmonizes in the most intimate inwardness with the feeling expressed.

'The sun is set, the swallows are asleep;
The bats are flitting fast in the gray air;
The slow, soft toads out of damp corners creep;
And evening's breath, wandering here and there
Over the quivering surface of the stream
Wakes not one ripple from its summer dream.'

Vital tranquillity — that is what you have in those verses, that is what we have here in a different way — vital tranquillity" —

So Mr. Parsons. But Gordon and Priscilla, who were perhaps more vital than tranquil on this occasion, were not contented to leave the expression of their feelings wholly to Mr. Parsons, or even to Shelley. "Why don't we climb up there, Miss Stanton, and plunge into some of the black gulfs ourselves?"

"I certainly propose to. Mamma, will you come?"

"No, dear, I think not. I have had all the exercise I want and am quite ready for a cab home. We will wait here a little while for you. Don't be gone long."

Side by side the two climbed the ragged steps, as actively as a pair of chamois. On one of the upper tiers they sat down, in the shadow of a gaunt doorway, and gazed at the great amphitheatre beneath, reeking, as Gordon said, with spectres, from Flavian to Daisy Miller. But Priscilla had not come there for spectres.

"I had a call the other day — from whom do you think?" she began.

"Edgar, perhaps?" Gordon suggested.

"No, though we did have him to dinner — and such a dinner. This was another friend of yours."

"I can't imagine" —

"The Countess Markovski."

Gordon was silent for a moment. Below them, in the wondrous moonlit calm, they could just catch Mr. Parsons's voice, repeating the last line of "The Question" —

"That I might there present it — Oh, to whom?"

"The Countess Markovski? Why?"

"Charmed with me, I suppose."

"Of course. Did she — a — tell you her history? It is a mania she has."

"She was more inclined to foretell, I think."

There was another silence and again the voices from below, but indistinct.

"She is a very charming person," Priscilla said indifferently.

"Very."

"Clever, I should say."

"Immensely clever."

"You admire her very much?"

"I do."

Then followed another question, which Priscilla would have kept back if she could; but she could n't: "You are very much interested in her?"

"I was very much interested, as you say, in her, at one time." Gordon spoke with the slow, colorless tone which often adds weight to the most important words. "I am interested in some one else now."

"She rather implied," Priscilla went on, once more against her will, "that your statements were not — altogether to be trusted."

"Did she?" Gordon spoke without the least irritation. "What can I do about it? I must leave you to your personal impression of her and me." Could he have said anything better? So Priscilla thought, at any rate, and was satisfied.

But at that interesting moment Mrs. Stanton's voice was heard in the calm air. "Priscilla, dear, come now."

"Yes, mamma," said Priscilla dutifully; but she was not well pleased with her mother just then.

"We cannot freeze here any longer," urged that lady, when her daughter had descended. "We are all going to ride home. You will come too, I suppose?"

"Oh, mamma, I had so much rather walk."

"But Mr. Gordon has walked enough, I imagine." Mrs. Stanton had a bit of the salt of mischief mixed with the gravity of age. Gordon, however, protested that he never rode, unless in his own carriage. "Very well, then. But you must come right along. It is getting late."

"Yes, mamma."

So the elders departed, Mr. Parsons and Mr. Stanton carrying on an active conversation as to the Panama Canal, a subject on which they fortunately agreed.

Priscilla and Gordon stood for a moment alone, listening to the echo of Mr. Parsons's sonorous declamation and looking up at the moonlit ruins. "I suppose we must go," said Priscilla.

"I suppose so," Gordon agreed, somewhat doubtfully. "Duty is what one does not want to do. That is a sure mark to know it by."

When they had left the building, Gordon suggested that they should return by the Via dei Serpenti and the Quirinal Piazza, so as to get the view of the city in the moonlight. He gave his arm to his companion and they walked on slowly, each burning to speak, each realizing that the precious minutes of solitude in that entrancing atmosphere were slipping away from them, yet neither ready or able to say the only thing each wished to say.

At length Gordon broke the silence: "As conversation does n't seem to be very active, perhaps I might beguile the tedious way by telling you a little story."

Priscilla thought she did not want to hear a little story; so she said nothing. But, after the first few words, she changed her mind, and showed it unconsciously by just the least little pressure of

her fingers on the story-teller's arm. "This is it," Gordon went on. "Once upon a time, in a far eastern country, there was a very wise and a very rich old king. This king had one son, who was neither wise, nor rich, nor amiable; but, being an only son and heir to the kingdom, his father was anxious to do what he could to make him worthy of his high position. Now it happened that in another country far away from that one there was preserved, in an old temple, a very beautiful diamond, which was not only beautiful, but had the curious and exceptional property of making any one who could succeed in getting possession of it fortunate and happy forever after. Only, it was a difficult thing to get possession of it. So many had tried and tried in vain that common people had almost given up the attempt. The king whom I am telling you of, however, thought that his son had better make the venture and would be very likely to succeed. Surely, a king's son must succeed, no matter who had failed. So he selected from among his friends and counselors a very wise old man, who had been particularly fortunate in directing his own concerns all his life, and ordered him to take the prince in charge, escort him to the far country, and bring him safely home, after the adventure of the diamond should be achieved.

"The wise old man was a little too wise to like the undertaking. As he got on further and saw more of the prince, he liked it less. Indeed, he

soon came to feel that the end of the journey would be one of the pleasantest events of a long and not unpleasant career. He had more reason still to feel so, before the end came.

“ Well, they reached the far country at last and they found the diamond. What happened ? In the first place, it became evident that the prince, prince though he was, could not get the diamond. It appeared that when the right person should come, he would have nothing to do but reach out his hand, and the precious stone would be lifted from its place, as easily as a pebble ; but at the touch of the wrong hand, it remained rooted in its socket, so that dynamite could not stir it. Now the prince’s hand was the wrong hand. What is more, although his tu— although the wise old man succeeded in persuading him to make one or two feeble efforts, he soon lost his interest in the diamond ; indeed, he had never felt very much.

“ It so happened that in the very same temple, all about the diamond, were gorgeous bits of colored glass, cheap, but showy to the inexperienced eye. Whoever chose one of these, instead of the real jewel, cut himself off from the diamond forever. The unlucky prince no sooner cast his eye on a particularly sparkling green gewgaw then he declared that he must have it. Diamonds were nothing compared to such a treasure as this. The wise old man argued, persuaded, commanded — in vain. The prince possessed himself of his choice

bit of sparkling vanity, and there the story ends, as regards him.

“ Meantime, the wise old man, who was neither so old nor so wise as he ought to have been, had got it into his head that he should like to have a try at the diamond himself. He was not vain enough to be confident. He was a little too wise and too old for that. But some things had given him a hope, a sort of presentiment. You see it was a foolish old man after all. Now, under all the circumstances, what do you think he ought to do? Does honor require that he should put that diamond out of his mind, trudge wearily back to his own country, and face the anger of the king all for nothing? ”

They had come out into the great piazza in front of the Quirinal Palace, and were standing at the foot of the noble statues, gazing over the city, which lay quiet in the witchery of the moonlight. Priscilla did not speak for a moment. Gordon could feel the tremulous pressure of her fingers on his arm. At length she said softly, but decidedly: “ I think the wise old man would do wrong if he went back so. If the diamond was really for him, if his hand was the right hand and no other, surely it was his duty to stay and take the stone and profit by it.”

They spoke no more then on the matter of diamonds; but as they stood there in the soft moonlight, looking over the black dome of St. Peter's into the west, towards home, Priscilla felt a deli-

cious, quiet, fulfilling ecstasy of joy which she had never even dreamed of before.

While they were walking slowly back, through the shadowy streets, to the hotel, Gordon told his companion just what the immediate situation was. He had written to Mr. Payne, explaining the whole state of affairs, so far as Edgar was concerned, and asking for advice as to what he should do. He thought it very probable that Mr. Payne would come over himself. In that case he, Gordon, would be free, his own man again, with obligations to no one. If Mr. Payne did not come, the freedom would necessarily be deferred for a time. But the chief object now was to obtain such freedom, just as soon as was consistent with what he felt to be his duty in the task he had undertaken. He explained all this in clear, business-like language, without a word of sentiment; but Priscilla understood him perfectly. She did not sleep much that night, nor Gordon either.

CHAPTER XXI

A BUSINESS PROPOSITION

FOR four or five days after the evening at the Colosseum, Gordon heard nothing of the Countess or of Priscilla, and saw very little of Edgar; but he had made up his mind to wait, and he waited. Finally he received one morning a little note in the well-known handwriting, with the black coronet on the envelope. "She won't like giving up that coronet," he thought to himself, as he examined the contents of the epistle. They were as follows: "Dear Mr. Gordon, — Could you make it convenient to call on me this afternoon, on a matter of business, about five o'clock? If it were not important, I would not trouble you. Sincerely yours, Antonia Markovski."

Now what was all this about? When he called on her last, she had said that it would be better for him not to come again; and when she had said so, she had expressed his own feelings exactly. What did she want? Well, there was one simple way to find out. To be sure, he did not care particularly about finding out. Still it was clear that he must go.

Then there came once more into his mind that

question of buying off. Now was the opportunity, if ever. He would at least be on the watch for any suitable occasion that might present itself.

So at five o'clock punctually he was in the Countess's drawing-room. She was there to receive him; but her general aspect had none of the winning grace which had been so marked at his last visit. She wore her out-of-door habiliments, even her heavy black hat, even her gloves, having evidently just returned from her daily drive. At the first glance, he thought she looked much graver, older, more worn even, than he had ever seen her look before. Then he remembered that it was in her power to look exactly as she wished.

She shook hands with him, and pointed to a chair. "Thank you for coming so promptly," she said. Her manner was courteous and cold, a shade haughty even, as if she had sent for a tradesman, or a lawyer say, to talk business.

Gordon seated himself and waited for her to begin. He had nothing to say. She did not keep him waiting long. After a moment's reflection, during which she might have been observing him, but did not appear to be doing so, she spoke in the same reserved, cold fashion as before. "I invited you to come here, Mr. Gordon, for a definite purpose. I have a statement and a proposition to make to you."

Gordon bowed gravely, as a respectful tradesman would, and prepared himself to listen. On the

whole, her mood suited him as well as any other could have done.

She hesitated just a second, as if to give him the opportunity of speaking, then went on, as before : " I told you the other day that I intended to marry Edgar Payne. I intend so still. The affair is progressing steadily towards the end I have in view, and you have doubtless discovered that nothing you can do is likely to delay the progress." Clearly she looked for some answer at this point ; but Gordon still kept silence, guided now by policy as well as inclination. He simply looked at her with the same quiet air of courteous interest.

If she was annoyed, she did not show it. " Of course you have," she continued, " but although I am perfectly satisfied as to the result of my — love affair, I want it to go faster. The young man is a boor, an oaf, a brute, as you know, but he is a little shrewd. He holds off, and gives me more trouble than I imagined he would. You see, I am frank with you. I can afford to be, your enmity is so little dangerous. Now, time is rather important to me. I cannot stay much longer in Rome, as I am, for reasons political and financial both. Do I make myself clear ? "

" Perfectly. Your statement is lucidity itself and fills me with curiosity as to your proposition."

" Very good." She paused a moment, watching him closely, while she seemed to collect her thoughts. She had got him placed, as does every

skillful manœuvrer in talk, so that his face was lighted and hers in shadow, though the whole lighting of the room was dim enough. "You remember, I charged you the other day with wishing to marry Miss Stanton?" Gordon's brows drew together a very little. "Don't be impatient till you have heard me out. That was a random shot. Nevertheless, I thought I would go and see the young lady and find out what it all means. I suppose she told you?"

"She did," replied Gordon, without further explanation. He was beginning to think that all his conversations with the Countess were to be monologues, and on the whole, he preferred them that way.

"Good. She is a clever young woman. She is pretty, and may be beautiful. Above all, she is young. Give us every other advantage, and youth will throw us every time. Very well. I suppose she will make you happier than I should; but that is neither here nor there. My proposition is simply this. Help me and I will help you. Facilitate my match and I will facilitate yours."

Gordon sat up straighter and opened his eyes wide; but still he said nothing.

"Do you understand?" This in a tone almost harsh, in its clear coldness.

"No," said Gordon slowly, hoarsely. "I did n't quite understand."

"You are dull. I say, help me, and I will help

you. Your young man there is just hanging on the edge. I can get him over, but it may be a little troublesome. Just one tactful word from you would save me all the trouble. Then I take hold for you. Edgar appeases his father. His father appeases Mr. Stanton. There you are. The daughter needs no inducement. I can see that. No woman does with you. Do you understand at last?"

She spoke with quick, sharp phrases and light, eager gestures, all the chilly acuteness of the modern woman of affairs. And Gordon felt at once the truth of what Edgar had foreseen as to her success in the stock market. The thought occupied him for only a second, however, for his mind was chiefly engaged with the infinite disreputableness of the proposition she was making. Had he really laid himself open to this? Was it possible that even such little contact as he had had with the people of this woman's world had put him on their level, till she could confidently ask him to do something so despicable? The very air of the room seemed to stifle him.

With this tumult in his thoughts he was slow in answering, even when she repeated her question. While he delayed, she tapped her little foot impatiently on the floor.

"I don't know what you think of me," he said at length. "This isn't a sort of thing I am used to."

"I think you are a fool," she said, with all the sharp snap of her nervous irritation. "And I am a greater fool for trying to talk business to you. That Edgar, who is n't a fool, whatever else he may be, has taken your measure thoroughly. But that you should have scruples and a conscience! They don't suit you. You ought to live for pleasure, and ease, and peace; and you ought to know that you can't have those things and be virtuous. Virtue is a luxury which is hardly purchased with all the charm of life; and when you've sacrificed everything for it, it is a drug on your hands. Still, there is a virtue even one like me can respect, hard, clear, cold, and consistent, which does not trifle with itself or with others. But your virtue! Ah, dear me! What a pale and simple thing it is. Shrinking into corners with its fingers over its eyes — sometimes — and then again starting out when nobody expects or wants it, least of all its owner. Pah!"

Gordon had continued his reflections during this tirade. On the whole, he was glad such a crisis had arrived. His duty was clearer to him now. He would have the whole thing out with Edgar. Then he would cable to Mr. Payne to come at once. Perhaps even yet he might arrive in time. But now, before doing all this, he would at least take his turn at making a proposition. Certainly, after what had just passed, it would not be her place to accuse him of any lack of delicacy.

"Antonia," he began, "supposing we don't talk about my virtue. The subject is of secondary importance." She made a scornful gesture of assent. "But since you have begun putting things on a business basis, I will take my turn. What should you say? I mean it occurred to me"—It was very disagreeable, and she did not help him a bit; just sat and stared icily. But he floundered on. "It occurred to me that perhaps Mr. Payne would make it worth your while, you know"—

Then she burst out. "You've come to it, at last, have you? I expected this long ago—and perhaps long ago I might have listened to you. It is of no use now. I want the boy himself. I want his father. I want the millions—all of them, do you see? I mean at least to have a try at them. I want to start over again, a new woman in a new world. And I want to win. I want to beat you. It is a poor triumph; but it will be one to me. At last I think we understand each other. Now go."

There seemed to be nothing more to be said. So Gordon went.

When he had left the room, the scorn and wrath instantly faded from Antonia's face. For a long time she sat quiet, drawing her gloves back and forth through her hands, absently.

CHAPTER XXII

WILL YOU WALK INTO MY PARLOR

NEARLY three weeks have passed since we saw Edgar and the Countess driving together in the Campagna. During that time Edgar's progress had been slow, but, as Antonia said, sure. The skill with which he was manipulated was bound to tell in the end. Gradually, very gradually, he found himself admitted into an intimacy which was all the more charming and the more binding, because he could hardly mark the steps by which it grew. Appointments at more familiar hours — early in the afternoon, late in the twilight; solitary walks in the morning to lonely churches and quiet palaces; those delicious bits of whispered intercourse in public places, which are the subtlest sweets of growing love: all these slight favors vouchsafed made Edgar feel more at home with the lady of his affections, but also fixed his mind more and more on a permanent relationship. Perfectly free and easy as she was in all her talk and manner with him, she made him appreciate that any undue liberty would be not only imprudent, but simply impossible.

The effect of Gordon's talk upon his pupil had

been null. Edgar really believed that Gordon was a natural liar ; but so far as the Countess was concerned, he did not specially care whether Gordon had lied or not. She might have had lovers in the past, but he was interested in the future. If she married him, it might be partly for money. Supposing it was so. He was not the one to respect her less for that. Again, she might not have much money herself. On this point he was certainly very anxious and would have given a good deal for information ; but his acquaintances in Rome were not of a sort that could give him any. Such mysterious rumors as had come to him were vague and evidently of a most unreliable nature. Yet, after all, it was she he was after, not money. He could make money for both. The more he saw of her, the more the idea of fatality about her grew upon him. He felt more and more confident that, with her beside him, he could go home and plunge and make big money from the start. So it was coming about that marriage was almost always in his thoughts. Only, he was a prudent young man and preferred to walk carefully. It would take just a few more of those delicious little interviews to decide him.

On the same day on which the Countess had requested a call from Gordon, she also sent a little note to Edgar. "Dear Mr. Payne, — Come and see me this evening. I am dining out — so tiresome ; yet I must. But I shall be at home by ten

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certainly. Come in for a few minutes and cheer me up. Sincerely yours, A. M." She had not received him before in the evening, except once or twice, when she had other guests, who had annoyed and irritated him beyond measure. This was a golden opportunity indeed. All the afternoon his attention was distracted from the stock-lists by thoughts of what was coming, and vague gleams of amorous witchery flitted across the arid columns of quotations.

At ten precisely he rang the Countess's bell and was ushered into her sombre, quiet drawing-room ; no Countess. Well, he had no proprietorship in her yet and could not find fault if she kept him waiting for a little ; but by George ! let her only be married to him —. He amused himself with a careful inspection of the room. Everything looked like money, certainly — pictures, furniture, books, flowers. But he thought he knew enough to know that such appearances were deceptive. Yet, after all, if she had n't much money, perhaps she would be more obedient, more dutifully acquiescent to a husband's plans and desires. For, though he was madly in love, he shrewdly suspected that her will and his might have some fierce battles in days to come. Then he thought of Priscilla and realized that it was just those battles that he looked forward to, or, at any rate, the splendid faculty of battling.

It was half-past ten now. He threw himself im-

patiently on a sofa and began to gnaw his nails with irritation. What did she mean by keeping him waiting like this? He would make her understand that he was not a child to be taken up and put away at the convenience of her fancy. He would tell her straight out what he thought. Where was she now? Why should she stay so late, if she was not enjoying herself? What business had she to enjoy herself without him? But then, it was true that he had as yet no right to abuse her in the matter. Ah, he must get that right as soon as he possibly could. His mind was made up. What was the use of wasting time and being bothered? All which reflections, as the sapient reader will naturally gather, were exactly in the line of what the Countess intended when she arranged this little matter.

It was eleven o'clock, and Edgar had just made up his mind that he would wait no longer, conscious, nevertheless, that he should wait till morning, if necessary, when a carriage stopped below; and in a minute there was a ring at the door of the apartment. Then voices were heard in the hall — Antonia's and that of a man, speaking French low and rapidly. The colloquy lasted for a minute or so, which seemed an hour to Edgar's jealous exasperation, and he ended by getting up and going towards the door, determined to find out who was this midnight intruder on his peace. But before he had taken more than a step or two, the talking

ceased, and the outside door opened and closed again. The portière which covered the entrance to the drawing-room was put aside and Antonia entered.

She paused a second on the threshold ; and the sight of her, as she stood there, changed Edgar's feelings instantly. She was dressed in black as usual, an evening gown of the most complete description ; but this was only barely observable under the heavy cloak which she was just loosening from her shoulders. The cloak was pure white, silk, trimmed with swan's-down, and reached in long, unbroken folds to her feet. She wore a large white hat also, with white plumes, one small, deep red plume in the middle of them, like a splotch of blood. As she stood there, black and white, her black-gloved hands silhouetted against the white silk, a dark, heavy, crimson curtain behind her, she was a wonderful picture, as no one knew better than herself.

It was only for a second. Then she came quickly towards Edgar, with both hands extended in warm, eager comradeship. " Ah, my friend, how good you are to come to me. I have kept you waiting shamefully, shamefully. Will you forgive me ? "

He forgave her with his whole heart. She sat herself down in the corner of a sofa and let him sit beside her. The heavy cloak was thrown half back from her shoulders, with a petulant gesture, and the hat laid aside. The disorder of her hair

and the glow in her cheeks, partly owing to the chilly winter wind, and partly to her evening's excitement, made her lovely to look upon. Round her neck, in delicate contrast with the subtle tones of her clear skin, was a double necklace of pearls, large, soft, radiant. As she drew off her gloves, the ever-present opal threw its pale sparkle from her finger.

For a moment she let Edgar enjoy the intimate charm which comes from being part of a woman's home, from feeling that for you she has laid aside her varied wrappings of artifice and convention, and relaxed perfectly into the simple habit of her inward life. Then she spoke softly and absently: "I am so tired, so tired, and so bored. You thought I stayed because I was enjoying myself, and were a little angry with me? Was it not so?" Her hands were playing idly with the long black gloves, but now she suffered him to seize one of them and keep it, though she took no notice of his pressure. "Ah, my friend, how tedious it is, the world, and what fools they are to run after it! Did you hear that man speak to me when I came in?" Edgar nodded, still holding the white hand with the opal. "I thought so. That man is a French marquis who wants me to marry him. Fancy! And he is fifty years old, and a beast, and hideous. And he bores me so." A little real shudder ran through her frame — if it was real. At any rate, it ruffled the fairness of her skin, as a little breeze ruffles

the surface of a summer lake. "Shall I marry him?"

"What? A cursed, frog-eating Frenchman? I knew he was spoony when I heard him. Why did n't I throw him downstairs?"

"Ah, if you are going to throw downstairs all the disagreeable people who want to marry me"—

There was silence for a moment. She had reclaimed her hand and was again drawing her gloves through it slowly and gently. Edgar felt that now was the time. He must speak, he would speak. No frog-eating, beggarly French marquis should come between him and his prize now. He was sitting with his face turned towards her, his arm resting on the back of the sofa, while she was looking straight away from him at the further side of the room, her eyes fixed perhaps on the deep shadows in the red curtains or perhaps on things and people far away. "Antonia," he began hesitatingly.

She read his tone at once; but she was not quite prepared; and she interrupted him softly. "Do you know," she said, "I had a call from Mr. Gordon this afternoon?"

"Gordy? What did he want? Some mean trick, I'll be bound."

She did not answer immediately, so Edgar's mind reverted to the former and more important subject: "Never mind Gordy, what do we care about him. But I say"—

"He came with an odd proposal," she interrupted again, speaking in a thoughtful tone, with her eyes still fixed on distance, her hands still trifling with her gloves. "What do you suppose? He asked me whether I would get you to help him — marry Miss Stanton."

"The confounded impudence! I say, that fellow does beat all for cool, perfect cheek. Of course, I don't want the girl, you know. Why should I? Hey? I can get something better than that — I hope. But to expect me to help him! Oh, won't I give him a piece of my mind?"

"No, no, don't do that. After all, he came to me in confidence."

"But what did you say to him?"

Antonia assumed a lovely air of injured dignity. "I told him I really could n't meddle in such intrigues at all, that I had no sort of claim on you which would entitle me to make such a request of you" — Here Edgar tried to interrupt, but she would not let him — "that it seemed to me under the circumstances, it was, to say the least, not very dignified for him to try to marry a young lady whom her parents had destined for a young man that was under his charge."

"By Jove! I dare say you fixed him all right." But Edgar's mind was on another subject now. How did it happen that she and Gordon were so intimate? Of course, he knew of their former acquaintance, and that Gordon occasionally visited

her ; but such an interview as this implied a closer relation than he was aware of. " I say," he began abruptly, staring at her, with just a trace of a frown on his cheerful brow, " how did you and Gordy get so thick all of a sudden ? "

Antonia turned and looked him straight in the eye, with the most natural and frank astonishment. " Why," she said, " I thought you knew that Mr. Gordon and I were old friends."

" Friends ! What do you call friends ? " was the harsh response.

" Has n't he ever spoken to you about me ? It is a reticence which he has not always practiced. Talking is his weakness — and saying things that he should n't say."

" I know that ; but what do you mean, anyhow ? What is it all about ? "

Antonia hesitated and re-settled herself in her corner. " It is only for one's best friends that one is willing to stir up these harsh and bitter memories ; so you see what I think of you." In reply Edgar made another effort — again a successful one — to possess himself of her hand. Then she went on softly, quietly, almost with tears in her voice : " When Mr. Gordon came here three years ago, he was three years younger than he is now. So was I. He was a green, inexperienced youth, always doing and saying foolish things, handsome, no doubt, but so ignorant of the ways of the world that he could not secure any entrance into good society.

I had the charity of youth then. I befriended him, introduced him, helped him on in the world, did everything for him, though perhaps I ought not to say so. Apparently, he misunderstood my kindness, as men always do, and thought I was in love with him. If you could have known him then, you would laugh at the idea, a great, clumsy, hopeless, self-conscious boy."

"I can see him from here," said the delighted Edgar.

"Exactly. So he asked me to marry him. I was completely taken aback, for, so far as I could make out, he had no money, no occupation, no position. Is it not so?"

"Of course it is — just a beggarly loafer — nothing else."

"Besides, I did not love him. Well, I told him all this, kindly, as you can imagine. I said I hoped he would not change towards me. If I could not have him for a husband, I wanted him for a friend. But it would not do. He is of a proud and jealous disposition, it seems."

"I should say so."

"My kindness returned to me, as it usually does. He would have nothing more to do with me, threw me over completely. That was not all. Would you believe it? He began to tell all sorts of stories about me, scandalous, abominable. He said that I — that I — I cannot repeat it."

Here the unfortunate lady, in whose voice the

tears had been growing more and more prominent, gave way to a passion of them, burying her face in her hands.

"Damn him!" Edgar shouted, completely overcome by that mixture of pity and helpless irritation which possesses every man in the presence of feminine weeping, the proportion of the mixture varying with the man's character and his relation to the lady concerned. "Damn him!"

Recovering herself, with an effort, at this vehement ejaculation, and smiling gently at her adorer, Antonia resumed: "You may wonder that, after all this, I was willing to receive him again. But he is a hard person to resist, where he is determined to make his way. Then, I thought it better to conciliate than to irritate him; for I was absolutely at the mercy of his tongue. When a woman is alone, it is hard, so hard" —

The tears began to flow again and Edgar could endure it no longer. Slipping off the sofa on to one knee, he put his arm about her, and forced her to look down at him through her tears. "Antonia," he said, "Antonia" —

"Don't pity me," she murmured, "I can't bear that."

"No, no! You don't need any pity. It was n't of that I was thinking. Antonia, I want you to be my wife."

Her face lighted up with a wonderful sad smile. "You are like the others," she said.

"No, I'm not like the others! You try me and see. I'll make something of you and you'll make something of me. I tell you, together we'll just make 'em stare. We'll go into the stock market and I'll cut a figure, and we'll go into society and you'll cut a figure. By Jove! It'll be great. Come now, there's a good girl!"

She listened thoughtfully to love's rapturous vaticinations, stroking his harsh, colorless locks with one pale, fine hand. But I doubt if she heard him. She was dreaming of the others, perhaps of one other. Then the comedy of the situation grew upon her. She thought she had never seen a more grotesque figure than the one kneeling before her, a Chinese idol, say, or the hideous illustration of a funny paper.

When she heard this last ardent request, she smiled again, more sadly still. "Not now, child, not now!" she said. "What would papa say, and Gordon, and Miss Priscilla?"

"Don't make fun of me," he cried, in anger. "What do you suppose that's got to do with it? I'm not a child, don't treat me like one."

"How petulant it is!" The smile got a grain of mischief in it. The caressing hand put a shade more tenderness in its caress. "I only want to say that you must not speak to me so now, when I have been working on your feelings, like a naughty, selfish thing as I am. God knows I love you enough. You are honest. And that is just the one .

thing I care for in the world, honesty and straightforwardness. I love you enough to be unwilling to injure you. Go away now. It is midnight. Go; and when you come again, it shall be as if these words had never been spoken. We will be friends together, as we have been. Go, I insist. No! No! No!" for Edgar, going in obedience to her orders, stopped yet a moment to lean over and kiss her again and again, muttering passionate exclamations of hope, rapture, and entreaty. When he reached the door, turning to look back, he cried, "You shall be mine, mine, mine!" Then she herself threw him one little kiss, with playful witchery.

When he had gone, she sank back in the corner, dull, listless, exhausted; and an expression of intolerable, sickening disgust settled on her face.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CRISIS

WHEN Gordon left the Countess's drawing-room, he felt that the crisis had arrived. If there was anything farther to be done, he must delay not a minute longer in doing it. He would see Edgar at once, make one last appeal to him, referring, if necessary, to his own personal experiences. Failing in this, as of course he should fail, he would cable to Mr. Payne to come out, if possible, and take his own measures, if he should arrive in season to take any measures at all. Meantime, he, Gordon, would simply throw up all responsibility for the whole affair.

With this decision clearly formed in his mind, he went directly home, hoping to find Edgar and go to work at once. In this he was disappointed. Edgar had gone out, leaving word that he should not be in till late in the evening. There was nothing for it but to wait. Gordon, however, had the gift, which is denied to so many, of waiting with perfect equanimity, even in very trying circumstances. He did not pass his time in dwelling on disagreeable details of the approaching interview, and forming neat and appropriate turns of

phrase to accomplish his object. Perhaps he would have accomplished his object better if he had done so; but he would have been much more uncomfortable in the interval.

As it was, he went and dined placidly and enjoyed his dinner. Then he thought he would go around to Morris's studio and have a chat. He had not recently seen much of Morris, who had been devoting himself to a wild and wealthy young lady from Kansas City. On the few occasions when they had met, Morris had inquired with great interest about the progress of Gordon's tutorship; but there had been no opportunity for affording him much information. Now, however, Gordon felt as if it might be pleasant to talk the matter over thoroughly with some one, and he knew of no one else to whom he could so easily go.

Morris's studio did not have exactly the appearance of a genuine shrine of art. As indeed, why should it? The various paraphernalia were there, easels, palettes, and brushes, canvases piled back outward against the wall in gray dismalness, casts of feet, hands, etc., old armor, oriental costumes, and all the rest of it. But somehow, those things seemed to be there for amusement and not for work.

The proprietor of this dubious establishment received Gordon with enthusiasm, and immediately set him at the piano to sing songs of indescribable and delectable humorousness, while the assembled young gentlemen — half a dozen or more — shouted

with glee and filled and emptied their pipes and glasses of brandy and soda. When the singer was at the end of his repertory, the party fell to conversation on Italian politics, American art, virtue, and other kindred and original topics. The fury of argument increased as the brandy and soda diminished ; but always when the former reached a state which threatened violence, Gordon, without the least affectation, threw in a scrap of a jest, or a word of humorous non-comprehension, which turned the storm into general laughter. Vehement disputation always bored him. It seemed to waste the serenity of life.

Gradually the brandy and soda went and the company went also ; until Morris and Gordon found themselves alone, in the smoky atmosphere, before the dying fire.

" I suppose you 'd like me to go too," Gordon suggested.

" My dear fellow, I never wanted to be alone in my life." Morris put more coals on the fire and produced more brandy and soda, from an apparently inexhaustible receptacle. " Besides," he went on, " now is the very time for you to tell me all about it."

" All about what ?"

" Your tutorship."

Gordon did not reply for a moment, but refilled his pipe and his glass, leisurely. Then he said, " I 'm in a devil of a mess."

"You always are. But you don't seem to mind it."

"I do mind it this time."

"Yet, after all, I don't see that you're much to blame?" Morris continued inquiringly.

"Why, what do you know about it?"

"Oh, I've watched you all along. I think I understand the situation. The two old fathers fix up a match and expect you to bring it about. The lady won't, and the gentleman won't, and the two old ones hammer you. I take it that's something the size of it."

"It is n't the size of it at all — ⁶ not a tenth part the size of it. You can't see half so far as you think you can."

"I can't, hey?" Morris rejoined, rather in a huff. "Then what is the situation, if you please?"

"Well, to put it briefly: the gentleman wants to marry the Countess Markovski, and the lady wants to marry me."

"The devil!" Morris almost dropped his pipe in astonishment.

"Well, I hope I'm not so bad as that, but I sometimes think I must be."

"As to the Countess," Morris observed, gradually collecting his senses, "you must remember that I prophesied it long ago; though I must confess I did n't believe it when I said it."

"You prophesied it! Yes. Like all prophets, who take delight in foreseeing their friends' mis-

fortunes. Why could n't you have done something useful, and told me how to prevent it?"

"Did you ever hear of a prophet doing anything useful?"

"See here, Morris," said Gordon, sitting up straight, puffing away with redoubled vigor, and looking his friend earnestly in the face. "See here. I have n't done right about this business at all. The first minute I saw the thing was going on, I ought to have had a frank talk with Edgar. I ought to have told him what good grounds I had to know the Countess's character thoroughly, and to have made it plain to him just what sort of a woman she was. Probably it would n't have done any good."

"Certainly, you might say," Morris interjected.

"And it would have been very disagreeable."

"Very," was the sympathetic echo.

"And I did n't do it. Instead, I have hinted once or twice vaguely at all the scandal floating about, as if I had heard it second or third or tenth hand. Naturally Edgar paid no attention to it whatever. If I tell him the real facts now, he will think I am inventing the whole thing."

"I should if I were he," suggested the comforting commentator.

"And yet," continued Gordon slowly, "I shall do it just the same. I shan't feel that I have made every possible effort in the matter, until I have at least appeared to speak with the authority of experience."

"Oh, Rob," said Morris, smiling, as he refilled his pipe, "of course you are doing the right thing. Tell the young man the whole story of your unfortunate love affair and what a thoroughly wicked, abominable creature you know the charming Countess to be. But don't suppose that you will ever appear to speak with authority or experience. You are n't built that way." Then, after a moment's pause, he went on: "But about the other point. That was what astonished me, you know. Miss Stanton — you said " —

"Oh, yes," said Gordon, "I'd forgotten her. That's another charming feature."

"You said she wanted to marry you."

"Did I? That was literary gorgeousness. I like to round my periods effectively."

"With the name of a young lady?"

"It certainly gives them a charming *embonpoint*. What I meant was simply, that I want to marry her. Can you imagine anything more trying under the circumstances?"

"Well, that depends. Is it all on one side?"

"Don't lay traps for my susceptible vanity. I have reason to suppose — that is " —

"I understand." And Morris added, with a sigh of envy: "Why the deuce is it that they all like you so? I suppose you don't try to make them?"

"Don't know how."

"That's it. Happy blunderer! And the papa?"

"Does n't know anything about it. We like each other, though."

Another silence of a minute or two, with more puffing and sipping. Then Gordon went on: "Well, what am I to do?"

"Why should I settle it?" Morris replied, with mock anger. "I'm not your confessor." But at a deprecatory gesture from Gordon, he added: "Oh, well, if you want my advice, I should ask the young lady for her hand. She's a peach." Gordon nodded emphatically. "Of course, you'll get a wiggling from the old gentleman at home; but you'll get that anyway."

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do." Gordon spoke emphatically and decidedly again. "I'm going to cable to him to come out here and then throw myself on his mercy."

"That will be so convenient for a man who has half a dozen railroads and trusts and so forth on his hands!"

"What's the use of being worth forty or fifty millions, if you can't go to Europe when you want to?"

"You can't be worth forty or fifty millions and do anything you want to, so far as I see. It is only those who have nothing who can do whatever they please."

"Very witty and sententious," said Gordon, with approval. "But I must tear myself away. My young charge will be getting home; and I want to have the interview over."

"You have my sympathy," Morris observed, standing up to superintend the process of getting Gordon into his overcoat. "And see here," he went on, "have n't I advised you to do everything you wanted to do?"

"You have, you have. That's what I came to you for." So, with a cordial good-night, they separated.

It is not necessary that we should follow Gordon's steps on his way home. When he arrived there, Edgar Payne had not returned, although it was nearing midnight, and Gordon sat himself down to wait. Even he did not find the waiting very pleasant this time. It was not that he had any dread of anything Edgar might say, or do; but the meeting, in itself unpleasant, seemed to be the crisis of a long experience of unpleasantness, which had been growing in intensity as it approached this culmination. Then, since his mind naturally refused the disagreeable, as a cork refuses to stay under water, he remembered that, if this was the crisis and the culmination, it might be followed by something more attractive; and gradually his thoughts became full of the elements of that possible attractiveness, so remaining until he was disturbed by the well-known flat and heavy tread outside. Coming to himself, he hurried to the door.

"I say, Edgar, step in here just a minute. I want to speak to you."

"It's late," was the discouraging reply.

"Never mind. I won't keep you long, but what I have to say is important."

The young man answered nothing, but came sulkily into the room and stood near the door, taking no notice of the chair which Gordon pointed out to him. This was not a very propitious beginning certainly. There was a moment's silence, Gordon also remaining standing, with one hand in his pocket and his other arm resting on the mantel. At length he spoke. "The Countess Markovski sent for me to call on her this afternoon. I went."

Still no reply; but the frown on Edgar's face grew blacker, if possible.

Gordon continued slowly, watching his companion with a keen glance: "I wonder what you would say if you knew the proposition she made to me?"

Then the thundercloud on Edgar's brow burst: "Proposition she made to you! The coolness of it! When the man went there to make an impudent proposition himself!"

"What is this?" asked Gordon, somewhat taken aback.

"What is this? The impudence of it! Did n't you go there yourself to get her to help you to marry that Stanton girl? Answer me now, did n't you?"

"Oh, that was the way of it?" said Gordon, beginning to take in the humor of the situation. "And

she said, perhaps, that I offered to help her marry you in return, did n't she? See here, Edgar, that woman is making a fool of you."

"I dare say. I'd rather have her do it than you."

"Can't you leave me out of the question? Ask all Rome what she is. Ask Mrs. Barton" — Edgar made a gesture of perfect impudence — "ask any decent fellow, if you know any, ask" —

"Come!" cried Edgar roughly, "what's the use of all this? I don't believe a word you say, you know. And if I did, what difference would it make to me? What do you know about it anyway? A parcel of lies that a lot of old women and lazy loafers like you get together and hatch up — they would spoil the character of an angel. You can't prove anything. If that's all you've got to talk about, I'll go to bed."

He turned and laid his hand on the door knob. "Hold on a minute," murmured Gordon. Then he paused, while Edgar waited with the knob half-turned.

"Well," growled the latter at length, "speak up, can't you? You're infernally slow."

It was hard work, awfully hard work. Gordon had n't realized what it would be, till the tug came. He still stood in the same position, his arm on the mantel, his head resting on his hand, reflecting even now, at the last minute, whether it was not better to hold his tongue. At length he spoke: "You

say I have no proof and you force me to tell you what I had rather not have told you. I am the last person to make unfounded assertions about a woman's character; but it so happens that in this case I know more than you suppose. Three years ago, when I was here, I — the Countess Markovski " —

But Edgar let go the door knob, took three steps right close up to Gordon, and shook his fist in his face. "You damned liar," he said in fury, "you damned, insolent liar. I know all about that story. She's told me the mean trick you played her. And what a fool you are too! Don't you suppose I can see that if you had anything true to tell, you would have told it long enough ago, told it all the first day, when you tried to set me against the smartest woman alive? You claim that you didn't like to hurt her character! Huh! Don't I know you? It's much you'd care about hurting her character, if there was any lie you could get up that would do you any good. But they won't! They won't! They won't!"

The fellow had worked his cold temper into an unnatural frenzy; and if his tutor had shown the slightest sign of fear, doubtless there would have been a set-to on the spot. But Gordon was perfectly brave in a quiet way, and paying no more heed to Edgar's fist than to his insolence, he kept the same tranquil posture, without taking his hand from his pocket or his arm from the mantel. It was

impossible for Edgar to do anything against such an attitude as this.

When his wrath had spent itself in a sufficient amount of ugly imprecation and he had drawn away a step or two, Gordon said serenely: "Have you done?"

"Done with you, by God, yes," was the hoarse reply.

"Then go."

"I will go; but if ever I hear of your telling any of this damned nonsense again about my wife — she will be my wife, do you hear that? She will!" When he had gone out of the door, he put his head back once more into the room and shouted: "She will!"

"Ouf!" said Gordon, drawing a long breath. "Have I got to the end yet?" It was not all over certainly, since there was Papa Payne to be met and a little explanation there not very pleasant to anticipate. Still, it did seem as if he had got by the worst; and, as he went to bed, he was surprised to find that he had absolutely no feeling of irritation against Edgar — a touch of pity rather. If he could have saved him even now and married him to Priscilla, he would have tried to make the sacrifice, so far as he himself was concerned — but he was glad there was no necessity for such a trial. Then he remembered Edgar's saying that Antonia had told him all about her relations with himself. Forestalled again! How clever she was!

How he would like to know what extraordinary version of the affair her lively imagination had concocted !

Meanwhile, if Mr. Payne were needed at all, he was needed now. So the next morning, early, Gordon sent the following dispatch : " Come at once. Will write Liverpool."

CHAPTER XXIV

AN ARCHÆOLOGICAL FAILURE

WHEN Gordon had sent his cable, it seemed to him that it would be better to leave Rome until affairs should have reached a new stage. It so happened that on the preceding evening Morris and his friends had planned a short trip of two or three weeks to Siena, partly for artistic purposes, partly for mere diversion. They had urged Gordon to join them, but he had given no positive answer, waiting to see what twenty-four hours would bring about. Now, he thought, on the whole, that he could not do better than go. So he went, starting with the rest, by the noon train that day.

He had seen nothing of Edgar in the morning, but he left word of his destination with the concierge, so that he might be informed if anything particular happened. Especially, he left directions that any telegram should be forwarded at once.

Just before starting, he wrote a little note to Priscilla as follows: "Dear Miss Stanton, — I have cabled to Mr. Payne to come out here, if possible. It seemed the best thing to do. Meantime, I am running up to Siena for two or three weeks (Albergo della Scala). I shall return the instant I have

definite news of Mr. Payne and shall hope to see you, the instant I return. Most sincerely yours, Robert Gordon."

The day after he reached Siena, he received a reply, in a handwriting he had already learned to study and to love: "Dear Mr. Gordon,— You have done just the right thing, I am sure. We shall be glad to see you as soon as you come back. Sincerely yours, Priscilla Stanton."

Ten or twelve days ran away pleasantly enough at Siena. Gordon could not have been a pining lover, if he had wished it; and I do not think he wished it. He was with gay young fellows, who knew how to amuse themselves; and no one of them understood the art better than he. On fine days they rambled about the streets or took long drives or walks into the country. When it rained, as it frequently did, they sought refuge in galleries and churches, or congregated in the studios of the few artists who had the courage to establish themselves for any length of time in the beautiful, but sepulchral city. The evenings were passed in theatres and cafés, which were, perhaps, none the less attractive for the faint odor of the mediæval that belongs to everything in the place.

What pleased Gordon was the sense of freedom. He had been used to being free all his life, too used to it; and the slavery of the last six months had become simply intolerable. Now he was his own man again, not obliged to pose perpetually

as a model of manners and graces to a young impossible, not bound to lie awake framing lectures on the cardinal virtues to be delivered to an unappreciative audience. Then, too, all the preciousness of liberty was sweetened, as with the faint, delicious breath of lilies, by the memory of a fair, merry face, grown more precious to him now than even liberty.

The only break in his halcyon tranquillity was the necessity of writing a letter to Mr. Payne at Liverpool. This task he accomplished, inside of the first week, by setting himself to it with repeated efforts. It was a long letter and need hardly be set down here. In it Gordon tried to give — and in the main succeeded in giving — an honest account of the gradual progress of events up to his departure from Rome. Naturally, he said nothing directly of his own former love for the Countess Markovski; but he spoke rather favorably of that lady, thinking that she would probably be Mrs. Edgar Payne, and that there was, therefore, no need of unduly prejudicing her future father-in-law against her. The match was, of course, a very, very undesirable one, he said, and he had done everything that lay in his power to prevent it, even to the point of endeavoring to buy the lady off. Still, she was a woman of the world, cultivated, intelligent, accustomed to good society, and might, in some respects, do Edgar an immense deal of good. In his own heart of hearts Gordon thought, though

he did not write it, that such a marriage might be the best thing that had ever happened to Edgar in his life.

What to say about Priscilla, he did not know. It did seem intolerable, certainly, to write that he was in love with the young lady and should propose to her as soon as Mr. Payne arrived. Yet if such were the fact, it ought to be stated; and such evidently was the fact. He therefore contrived some miserable circumlocution, as he himself felt it to be, neither excusing nor accusing his own conduct, but halting between the two; and after rewriting and remodeling, in the wearisome fashion which always makes a bad matter worse, he sent off his epistle. In any case, there must be a very disagreeable interview between himself and Mr. Payne when the latter should arrive. Nothing that he could write beforehand would make that much easier. And when that was once over, everything would be over, so far as he was concerned.

As to Mr. Payne's attitude in the matter, Gordon often reflected very curiously, and very sympathetically also. How would he take it? That he understood Edgar thoroughly and had no great affection for him Gordon shrewdly suspected. But the father was a proud man, and especially a man who liked his own way and was accustomed to having it. Would he be rough and angry? Would he be hurt and sensitive? Would he see, by any

chance, the humor of the thing and enter into it in a spirit of philosophic appreciation? These questions were rather anxiously debated in the intervals left by Sodoma and Pinturicchio, beer and cigars, and the merry song and jest of an idle company.

When nearly two weeks had passed and Gordon began to think he had better be making his way back, without regard to telegrams, he received one morning the following brief note from Edgar: "Dear Gordy, — She will be mine at last. Marriage to-morrow night. You'd better come back, you know. She wants to see you. Yours, etc., E. Payne."

Gordon made no reply to this note, not having the slightest desire to see either Edgar or his wife. On the very next afternoon, however, a dispatch from Liverpool was forwarded to Siena. "Shall be in Rome Tuesday noon. Hotel Royal." There was no time to be lost, and, bidding good-by to Morris and the rest, Gordon took the night train, feeling that the critical tide in his affairs was very near the flood.

As soon as he reached Rome, he went directly to his lodgings and inquired for Edgar, but was told that he had been absent a great deal of late, often not returning even at night. This seemed perfectly natural under the circumstances, and without giving the matter any further thought, the eager lover at once hastened to Hotel Bristol. Mr. and Mrs.

Stanton were both out ; but Priscilla was at home and received her visitor immediately.

" Well," he said, holding her hand a moment longer than propriety required, " well, here I am."

" Which means, I suppose, that Mr. Payne has arrived. Have you seen him ?" She spoke with that indifferent frankness which women, trained from their infancy, can so easily assume, talking about the weather, or the musical glasses, or anything but the subject which is nearest their hearts and must be furthest from their tongues. Gordon's spirit sank within him and he told himself he had been a fool. Well, he could go out as a private to the Philippines and lead a strenuous life still. Meantime, she had asked him a question.

" No, I have n't seen him. He has n't arrived yet, I imagine. Will be here this noon."

" Ah !" she said. " And Edgar ?"

" Married."

" You don't mean it. Who told you ?"

" He wrote me a note with his own fair hand and invited me to return and congratulate the bride."

" Well, so you ought." They had been standing hitherto, but now Priscilla suggested chairs. This did not suit Gordon, however. He had a good deal to say and he did not care to risk being interrupted at an important moment.

" Why not go out somewhere ?" he suggested. " It is so much pleasanter."

"I should like it of all things. Do you know, I was wishing the other day that you would show me the Palatine. I have been there, of course; but it is different when one has one's own guide all to one's self. Will you take me there this morning?"

There was more of the old, sweet, intimate manner in this, and Gordon began to revive. "The Palatine, by all means," he answered. "Nothing would suit me better."

Priscilla could get ready as quickly as any girl, which, of course, is not very quickly from a man's point of view; but in fifteen minutes they were making their way through the crowded streets in a melancholy cab. As they went along, Priscilla, who seemed to Gordon to feel an unusual and painful necessity for conversation, went into a not very interesting description of her doings during the past two weeks, the names of various places and people getting themselves oddly mixed up with the harsh Italian street cries and the rattle of innumerable vehicles.

When they had parted with the cab, however, and had entered the sacred precincts of the palace of the Cæsars, everything was different. It was impossible for Priscilla to be nervous or restless amid the quiet loveliness of the loveliest of ruins, and in a minute she settled down into her customary tranquil sunny mood. The day was as fair and fit for love-making as that inclement season could afford them. The west wind, blowing strong and fresh

after a storm, had swept every bit of vapor from the clear heaven, but had not brought any trace of bitterness or cold. The fresh morning fog had covered the ivy and the stones with moisture. The birds sang clear and loud. In the sunny nooks a flower still lingered here and there, brave and defiant of the wintry season.

Our two sight-seers made their way leisurely round the back of the hill, past the walls of the primitive city, and so to the summit. But I fear their minds were less on the past than on the present.

"Do you know," said Priscilla suddenly, "I have an idea."

"Ah, that's very interesting," was the sympathetic response.

"It is interesting. Just as soon as ever I get home, I shall send and invite Mr. Payne — uncle Harrison, I call him — to dine with us to-night."

"That will be very interesting — certainly — for uncle Harrison."

"Stop a minute. I expect you to come to — and Mr. and Mrs. Edgar. Won't that be fun?"

"No," said Gordon, with decision. "I think it would be the messiest kind of a mess I ever got into. Pray, don't think me rude."

"No, not rude, but very disagreeable. — Let me see, I think you said this was the palace of Tiberius?"

So they resumed their archæological investigations and Gordon strove to do his duty like a man.

They explored the house of Livia, then the palace of Augustus. Gordon explained the method of ascertaining the age of any particular ruin by the quality of the brickwork, pointed out the names of the manufacturers engraven on the lead water pipes, and otherwise displayed all that he knew on the subject and a good deal more, as one does on such occasions. It was very proper and very instructive; but they both felt that it was rather hollow, as compared with their day at Hadrian's Villa. Ruins make a most satisfactory foundation for love-making, but when it comes to the superstructure they leave something to be desired.

After an hour or so of this kind of thing, they found themselves in a sunny nook at the back of the hill, looking toward the south. It might have been the cabinet of some deceased emperor, where he made the world tremble with the nod of his after-dinner nap. They cared very little what it might have been; but at that moment it was full of the soft noon sunshine. While they sat there quiet, a small green lizard started out from the weeds and ran with marvelous lightness up the wall beside them. Far away, they caught a glimpse of the distant mountains and the bare hills of the Campagna.

Suddenly, without any premeditation whatever, Gordon rose and stood in front of Priscilla, looking down into her eyes, which were raised to his in wonder at the precipitancy of his action. "Miss

Priscilla Stanton," he said, "I have decided to throw over all considerations of duty, gentlemanliness, and general respectability, and ask you for the honor of your hand."

Priscilla, too, rose. Her color was a little heightened, but she continued to look at him steadily from under the shadow of her brown hat, and a sweet, quiet, little smile played round the corners of her mouth. "Mr. Robert Gordon," she answered, as clearly as if she were pronouncing the marriage vow, "you know very well that if you were throwing over any one of those fine things, I would not give you my little finger. Here is my hand." And she gave it to him, and they sat down again. It was a broad, flat stone that they had chosen, large enough for two, under the circumstances, and no face of prying Italian guide, or sight-thirsty American wanderer, happened to turn the corner while they sat there. Yet I dare say the Countess Markovski would have thought them a very frigid pair of lovers. I myself admit that their affection was of a calm and tranquil character; but I think it was destined to hold deeper and last longer than some that flame up with more volcanic fury.

"I suppose I ought to have spoken to your father first," remarked Gordon, a little later, "but the circumstances were peculiar."

"Yes," Priscilla agreed, "they were peculiar. I am glad you spoke to me first."

"What will he say?"

"He will be pleased and proud, as he ought to be."

"That is very kind of you. But I am so awfully poor, you know."

"But he is so awfully rich, you know. Just now he is putting up daily thanksgivings for his escape from a rich son-in-law."

"But I must go to work," Gordon urged. "It will be ages before I can earn enough to provide you with carriages, and gowns, and that sort of thing."

"Well, I can't be happy without carriages, and gowns, and that sort of thing; but I'm not in the least worried. You shall work. I'll see that you do. There now, let's talk of something else. To return to my dinner."

"Oh, yes, that dinner."

"Do you still disapprove of it?"

"Well, I think it will be queer, you know."

"Of course it will be queer at first; but that would all wear off. You men don't know how to manage these things. I'll arrange to see uncle Harrison before papa comes, and I'll make him forgive everybody. Only will Edgar and Mrs. Edgar come?"

"Oh, yes, they'll come. She'll make him."

"By the way," added Priscilla. She went on to ask a few more explanations in regard to Gordon himself and the Countess Markovski. Very little

was needed between two souls so perfectly honest and loyal to make it clear that the future Mrs. Gordon need not give a moment of anxiety in that direction.

"Now," said Gordon, "for Mr. Payne." He looked at his watch and gave a long whistle of dismay.

"Mr. Payne? What about him?"

"Nothing. Only he was to arrive at noon and it is after, now. I must go and quickly."

"You had better leave it all to me. Just wait till I see him this evening. I will explain everything."

"That is a very sweet offer; but I don't think I can begin shielding myself behind you — yet. I dare say I shall soon enough."

"But you will not have a pleasant time at all. You may spoil everything."

"You express my own feelings exactly. Nevertheless" — and Gordon got up, as if to move on.

"We have so much to talk over," said Priscilla, pouting.

Gordon sat down and attended to the pout. "You don't think I want to go," he murmured. "Let us stay here forever."

But Priscilla, having gained her point, changed her mind, as was to be expected. "No," she sighed, "we must go!" She got up in her turn. Before they started, however, she gave one more thoughtful look about her. "We shall remember this

spot," she murmured softly. "It is sacred to Cæsar — and to us. Perhaps we shall come here again, in a dozen years or so."

"Or to-morrow?" Gordon suggested.

"No, not to-morrow. It would not seem quite the same to-morrow."

They made their way quickly back toward the gate, the warm light of noon falling rich and mellow about them, and the pale, wintry verdure gleaming in it, over the eternal tranquillity of those sombre walls, which had seen and sheltered so many, many other lovers. Gordon, urging the forlorn cab-driver to unprecedented speed, left Priscilla at home, and then drove to meet his fate at the Hotel Royal.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TUTOR'S AUDIT

HARRISON PAYNE was a very remarkable man. Born in New England, of an old and most respected family, he had lost his father when quite young and his mother had been wholly unable to manage him. At an early age he had run away from home, wandered out to what was then the west — Illinois — and plunged into the struggle for existence, with all the ardor of his Yankee blood. Though a rapid reader of such books as came in his way, he had had little regular education and had hardly felt the need of it. What was most interesting about him, what had made his success, was the union of a romantic, sensitive, imaginative temperament, always carefully concealed under the sternest reserve, with an unalterable will. In the Middle Ages he would have been a terrible knight-errant. In modern America he was a terrible man of business ; not one of the plodders, who make money because it comes in their way, but restless, scheming, full of vast, ideal enterprises, yet always reducing those enterprises to the sternest rules of practical common sense. This was what made him feared at the Exchange. You never

knew what extraordinary and portentous combination he was holding up his sleeve.

His heart was as tender as a child's, if you could touch it. He loved strong and strongly contrasted emotions. The theatre enchanted him. The tears would run down his cheeks at the crisis of a sentimental melodrama; and then, when the act drop fell, he would cry out: "Now let's have a little of that snare drum." Poverty and suffering appealed to him at once: he would do anything to relieve them. Yet neither poverty nor suffering, no thing and no body, counted for a moment, as an interference with the execution of his plans.

It was into the presence of this personage that Gordon was ushered, in a private parlor at the Hotel Royal; and the young man entered not without certain tremors, it must be confessed. Mr. Payne was tall, very slight, somewhat awkward and ungainly in movement; and so far there was resemblance to Edgar, although the father had something dignified, even in his awkwardness. But the face and head were altogether different from Edgar's. An abundance of somewhat coarse black hair was brushed up high from the broad, low forehead. The lower part of the face was thin, and the chin not large, though strong and cleanly cut. The nose was rather prominent and the cheek bones; but the feature which at once seized your attention was the great brown eyes, which could be filled with infinite depths of tenderness, and

could veil themselves, as it were, and be as hard as steel.

The eyes were hard when Gordon entered the room, and they continued so. Mr. Payne shook hands with him, received him with all necessary courtesy, uttered no word of reproach or unkindness; but his air was exactly that with which he would have received a drummer who had taken charge of a valuable case of goods and had it stolen. Oh, that business manner! How often a man, and especially a woman, feels it, happening to visit a friend, even a relative, at noonday, in a down-town office! It seems as if an armor were put on, stiff, formal, impenetrable, selfish; and the creature inside of it is so different from the man at home, standing on the hearth rug, or dawdling over his eggs Sunday morning, in old coat and slippers. Never once during the interview did Mr. Payne drop that business manner. Never once did his eyes gleam or his lip tremble. Gordon would a thousand times rather have been sworn at.

When they were seated, Mr. Payne drew Gordon's letter from his pocket. "I have here yours of the eighth," he said; "but I do not find it in all respects perfectly clear. Perhaps you will allow me to ask you a few questions."

"Certainly," said Gordon. Then he went on, with one vain attempt to get in first and plead his cause in his own way. "Mr. Payne," he began, "if

you will allow me, there are a few things I should like to say" —

But Mr. Payne interrupted, with quiet blandness: "Pardon me; but I always find more is accomplished by proceeding in an orderly, business-like manner."

Gordon drooped and made no further efforts. The one thing now was to get it over.

"I believe," Mr. Payne inquired, as if really seeking information, "that you had some difficulties with my son before your arrival in Rome? Am I correctly informed?"

"Perfectly. I never had anything else."

"I think, however, that you never suggested making any change in the arrangement?"

"It was my impression that I was paid because I was to have difficulties."

"Ah!" said Mr. Payne. Then he continued, still holding the letter in his hand, but not in any way referring to it: "After your arrival in Rome, you made efforts to keep Edgar in contact with respectable people?"

"I did."

"And failed?"

"Most lamentably."

"But it was through you that he first met this person — what is her name?"

"Mrs. Edgar Payne. I would have mentioned it at first, if you had thought best."

Mr. Payne did not alter his manner in the least,

but merely said : " Already ? You have put me to useless trouble, it seems."

" I am sorry," was the humble response.

" It was through you, then, that he became acquainted with her ? "

" It was."

" Yet you knew her character ? "

" I did. But pray believe that as soon as I saw what was going on " —

" Yes," said Mr. Payne, with the same deadly quiet, " I understand. Now as to Miss Stanton." Gordon squirmed ; but his tormentor either did not notice or did not care. " Your efforts to bring my son into her society totally failed ? "

" Never anything more so."

" And as far as I can make out from this," touching the letter, " which is not very explicit on the point, so soon as you found that she would have nothing to say to Edgar, you began to pay attention to her yourself. Again, am I right ? "

Gordon hesitated, in very great and evident distress. Finally he said : " Yes, although I should like to put the matter differently."

" Facts are what we are looking for in business," said Mr. Payne. " Ways of putting them are so apt to be misleading." Then he placed the letter in the breast pocket of his coat and buttoned the coat over it. " Mr. Gordon," he said, " I do not think we have anything further to say to each other. If you will send me your account at

your earliest convenience, it will be settled immediately."

As he spoke, he rose from his chair, and Gordon was compelled to rise also. The bitter coldness of this reception, which was not quite what he had expected, took him entirely aback. Yet now, when, if ever, it was manifestly his turn, he could not control the flood of feeling which rushed to his lips. "Mr. Payne," he cried, in anguish, "Mr. Payne, I could put this all so differently" —

"Excuse me," said Mr. Payne, "but I have already said that I do not believe in different ways of putting things. Good-afternoon." Then he turned and walked out of the room.

After all, Gordon did not know what he could have said. Mr. Payne's clear, hard statement of the matter was, in a certain sense, the absolute truth. Any attempt at excuse would have involved accusation of Edgar, of Antonia, of Mr. Payne himself, of Priscilla even. It was better to take the punishment in silence.

Nevertheless, as he left the Hotel Royal his general impression was that his best course would be to throw himself into the Tiber. Yet the Tiber was such a very muddy and disgusting stream. The idea of what his friends would see, when he was fished out, was unpleasant to his æsthetic susceptibilities. Besides, he had promised to dine with Priscilla.

CHAPTER XXVI

WHAT CAME OF IT ALL

PRISCILLA had laid her plan of campaign with great care. She had made her father send a note to Mr. Payne, explaining that he was prevented from calling that afternoon, but hoped that his old friend would dine with them. Mr. Payne had replied that he would, at any rate, call, somewhere between five and six, "implying," said Priscilla, "that he will stay to dinner if we can persuade him to. We'll see about that."

A note, written by Priscilla herself, was also sent to Mrs. Edgar Payne, frankly explaining the circumstances and the writer's desire of bringing about a reconciliation, and expressing the hope that Mrs. Payne would do her part by coming to dine. No answer was received; but Priscilla attributed this to the shortness of the time and hoped that the lady would reply in person.

Priscilla further made such other little arrangements as were necessary, the most essential being that her father and mother and Gordon should not appear until they were wanted. Then she sat herself down in the parlor, at a little before five, lest Mr. Payne should be ahead of his hour. It may be

as well to add that she was dressed in a soft, vague diffusion of pink, which, with her blond hair and blue eyes, made her look simply like an angel.

At half-past five Mr. Payne was ushered in. When he saw who was to receive him, he tried to sustain as much of the morning's chilly aspect as was possible with a lady; but Priscilla melted this in half a second. "O uncle Harrison," she said, giving him both her hands and one cheek, "how lovely of you to come way over to Rome — and so unexpectedly too. Sit right down on the sofa beside me. I want to talk to you."

Evidently the business air would not do now. So Mr. Payne, who was full of resources, tried another, the patronizing, the "my-dear-little-girl-what-is-your-dolly's-name?" as it were. "Is your papa well?" he asked. "I should like to see him, if he is in."

"Yes, he is in, and you will see him, when you are through with me."

But Mr. Payne would take no hints of this kind. He had not come four thousand miles to be done immediately, even by an exquisite symphony in pink. "I suppose you like Rome?" he asked blandly. "The shops are pretty? And the churches are interesting? And the ruins?"

"I adore the ruins," said Priscilla, with enthusiasm. Then laying her hand on his arm, she went on, in a changed tone, with all the incredible insolence of beauty: "This is of no sort of use, uncle

Harrison, none whatever. I am a woman now and you have got to listen to me."

The hand on his arm was too much. His irritation was slowly giving way to charm and amusement. He leaned back in the corner of the sofa, with a sigh. "Well?" he asked.

"Ah, now we shall get on famously." It was Priscilla's turn to assume a business air, Mr. Payne's to submit, as Gordon had done in the morning. "I believe Mr. Gordon has already had a talk with you?"

"Well, yes, I had a talk with him." Mr. Payne's eyes smiled a little.

"That is very unfortunate," continued Priscilla. "Men always say the wrong thing to each other — and then are proud of it."

A solemn bow testified to the truth of this piece of profound wisdom.

"I've got to scold you, uncle Harrison," the young lady went on. "I'm sorry, but it's necessary."

"Oh, I thought it was I that was going to" —

"That's another mistake men always make. If anything goes wrong, scold a woman. A great deal has gone wrong in this case — that is, for you. Shall I tell you whose fault it has all been? Yours."

He was positively getting interested. It certainly was better for Priscilla to manage the thing than for Gordon.

She went on again, remorselessly, knowing perfectly well that with a man like that, the high tone was the only tone: "Yes, it has been all your fault. I'll tell you how. There's poor Edgar" — Mr. Payne's brow contracted a shade. — "Do I hurt you, as the dentist says, when he jabs particularly hard? — We must take Edgar first. Don't you think you ought to have brought up a boy like that differently? You ought to have kept him near you and trained and guided and softened him by affection and tenderness. Considering what he is, I don't think you could have expected him to turn out any better."

It was rather bold play; but the young lady was acute for a miss of her years. She shrewdly suspected that Mr. Payne was more hurt in his pride than in his affection, which she did not believe to be very intense, so far as Edgar was concerned. Now affection must be soothed; but pride may be battered.

She went on, having received no response: "Then Mr. Gordon comes along. Now, uncle Harrison, you ought to have seen through Mr. Gordon just as quickly and just as clearly as I could. You thought he was a gentleman and would make Edgar one; but gentlemanliness is n't caught by contact, like measles. You ought to have known that in the whole wide world there was nobody less fit to manage Edgar than Mr. Gordon. Did n't you know it?"

"It appears not," was the genial answer.

"Well, ought n't you to have known it?"

"I suppose I ought."

"Of course you ought. To proceed. Edgar comes over here and he sees a countess. You know what that means to one of us. Now, don't you believe that Mr. Gordon did everything he possibly could?"

"I am perfectly willing to render him that justice."

"And do you believe he could possibly do anything?"

"Anybody could have foretold that he could not." Mr. Payne was really beginning to enjoy himself. Priscilla was entirely right in supposing that he had little affection for Edgar; he had always been ashamed of him, although he had meant to give him everything a father could. In this affair, it had been his pride that had suffered, and he was taking bitter-sweet medicine for it now.

"So you see," continued his physician, "the said countess logically becomes Mrs. Edgar Payne. Who is to blame, unless in the first place, you? But it may not be so bad after all," she added caressingly. "Wait till you have seen her. She *is* a beauty. Of course, she's older than he — but I think she will manage him all the better for that. She may make you very happy."

"Thanks for your encouragement, I'm sure. I had n't thought of it in that light. You are cer-

tainly very magnanimous to your triumphant rival."

"Don't be so bitter, uncle Harrison. I was just coming to myself — last. Now, you see, Mr. Gordon has fallen in love with me. I suppose that may be a little my fault." She looked down, with a mock imitation of coquetry, which, in her frank nature, was comically bewitching.

"Oh," said Mr. Payne, gently bewitched. "It is refreshing to find something at last that I am not responsible for."

"But surely," she went on, with the same manner, "Mr. Gordon is not to blame. I suppose he found me — quite fascinating — and there were so many opportunities, so much to explain, you know. In short," — and here she sank down on her knees before him and raised both hands in melodramatic supplication, — "in short, I want you to forgive us all right here and now — Robert, and papa, and mamma, and Edgar, and Mrs. Edgar, and me. And I will never, never rise from my knees until you do, although the position is already becoming very painful."

What could he do, what did he wish to do, but take both her hands and raise her gently and kiss her forehead and say that he would forgive the whole list, "although it is hardest to forgive you," he added. "Ever since you were a little, little girl I counted on your being my daughter. I am so unused to having my plans thwarted."

"That is because you are used to managing animated dollars and cents, which can be handled and calculated. It takes a nicer touch to deal with women." Then looking up and seeing an unwonted dimness — was it even moisture? — in the deep brown eyes, she said softly: "But I will be your daughter. Robert and I will be a son and daughter to you, and you shall come and visit us so often, — so often, — just as often as papa and mamma."

Then he kissed her forehead again, with a delicate tenderness, and seemed ready to change the subject. "If I have paid a sufficient penance for everybody's else sins, perhaps I might be allowed to see your papa?"

"Well, yes," answered Priscilla thoughtfully, "perhaps you might." She touched a bell, and the door opening, with a promptitude which suggested pre-established harmony, Mr. and Mrs. Stanton entered.

The greeting between the old friends was much more cordial than it would have been an hour earlier. Mr. Stanton spoke a word or two about recent unpleasantnesses, which was gently received. Then they fell to talking of the money market. But this did not suit Priscilla; so she touched the bell again, and Gordon appeared. Mr. Payne hesitated just an instant. Then he stepped forward and held out his hand. "Good-evening, Robert," he said. "We had our little business interview this morning. This time it is for pleasure."

"I hope it will be all for pleasure in future," Gordon answered, in his easy way. "I prefer it."

"That will depend on the way you treat this young person," and Mr. Payne smiled at Priscilla, who smiled back.

"It is she who will do the treating," Gordon rejoined. "I have a tutor of my own now."

"By the way," asked Mr. Payne, turning to Mr. Stanton, "what time do you dine, George? You did n't mention in your note."

"We ought to be dining at this moment, I suspect."

"Not quite yet," objected Priscilla. "I want to wait a few moments longer." She looked inquiringly at her father and neither of them seemed perfectly satisfied.

Just then a note was brought in to the young lady. Gordon's quick eye observed the black coronet on the envelope. "Edgar's economy already," he murmured, "using up the old stationery."

Priscilla glanced at the epistle and seemed quite overcome. Then she read it aloud: "'Dear Miss Stanton, — I have been out all day and only this moment' — it is dated 5.30 P. M. — 'received the kind note which I suppose you intended for me, although the address is somewhat singular. I am not Mrs. Edgar Payne; nor have I the slightest intention of ever becoming that fortunate lady. Under the circumstances, perhaps it would be better for me not to accept your invitation to what

appears to be a strictly family party. If I knew the whereabouts of young Mr. Payne, I would forward your note to him. As it is, I have no doubt he will soon be in the arms of his affectionate parent. Pray believe me to be, dear Miss Stanton, sincerely yours, Antonia Markovski.' ”

For a few moments no one spoke. Then Mrs. Stanton said : “ Well, I don't see what it all means ; but as there seems to be no way of finding out, suppose we go to dinner.”

They went to dinner ; but curiosity was stronger than appetite, and they conjectured more than they consumed. Yet no amount of conjecture afforded any satisfactory explanation of affairs.

Nor did Edgar's appearance the next morning to partake of the paternal embrace help matters much. He explained his absence from his lodgings during the last day or two on the ground that he expected Gordon's return and wished to avoid him. The ill-treated lover further expressed unqualified disgust at his father's arrival in the Eternal City ; but he absolutely refused to discuss countesses or marriages and seemed only eager to pack up and be off to his beloved America.

The mystery was solved, however, when a letter came to Gordon from Siena, having been forwarded from Rome the day before he left the former city. The contents were as follows : “ Dear Robert, — I could have had him ; but when it came to the point, I did n't want him. Why ? How do I know ?

After all, the great thing was to beat you. Such a poor triumph! Since beating or beaten, you are happy just the same. But he is so hideous. And then, I might not have got the money. And then, what difference does it make? And it was such fun to hear him storm; for I gave him no reason except that I had changed my mind. Such oaths! Such intolerable picturesqueness of your low American insolence. I had to threaten to have him put out of the house at last. Robert, I believe I did it out of love of you, after all, just to please you a little bit. And why should I love you? And do I love you? Never mind. It is all an abominable puzzle anyway.

“Only, when you are happy with your Priscilla — you will have to show her this and I hope it will annoy her a little, at any rate — just think of me as having done one good deed, against my inclinations. Think of me as hunting down another golden calf — and sparing him — or as playing politics in Paris or St. Petersburg — or as a nun, telling my beads all day, all day, all day — or as a crooked spinster, in a lonely tower, on a barren moor — or as just taking morphine to have done with it. I shall leave Rome the middle of the week and you will hear nothing more of me. Good-by, Robert Gordon.”

It will be easily imagined that this remarkable epilogue to the drama of Edgar's love affair was not shown to Mr. Payne or to the elder Stantons,

who had to be contented with the simple information that the Countess herself had seen fit to break off the match.

"Even she couldn't stand him," said Mr. Stanton confidentially to Gordon. "I don't wonder."

The letter was, of course, read by Priscilla ; but the few further explanations with which it was supplemented prevented her annoyance from being very deep. At the same time, I think she was well contented that the Atlantic Ocean should roll between her future and that terrible black Countess.



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